

"Pure and Peaceable - Lessons from Paul's History in Acts and Galatians"

Christian Liberty
The Rev. Ted Wood
Various Scriptures
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Ted: The Lord be with you.

Men: And also with you.

Ted: Let us pray. Lord God, in Your word Your apostle Paul prayed that we would all be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy. We pray for ourselves, our families, and for our congregations, that we would be strengthened with all power for the purpose of endurance and patience with joy, for we ask this in Your name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Ted: I need your help with something. I had spoken to Bruce, and what I said to Bruce was that I said, "Those of us who come regularly want to get all that we can from you as long as we can." So we want to get all we can as long as we can. And we sit under Bruce's teaching which is superb, and his example, every Friday.

And it just began to occur to me that I had a number of questions I wanted to ask Bruce about his preparation. How does he prepare for these lessons? What are the disciplines he follows in his personal life? Because well beyond what Bruce teaches--the content of the teaching—is the content of his character.

Participant: Amen.

Ted: And I want to find out more about the content of his character So I spoke to Bruce and I said, "May I interview you?" And I've received permission from Bruce to have a couple of others from you come along so I don't miss anything, and to ask Bruce, "How do you get ready for a Bible study? What do you do in your individual devotional life? How do you do that? What are the things you're thinking about now that strike you, that have kind of risen to your mind as you grow and mature in the faith?"

And he gave me permission to do that. And the other thing he gave me permission to do is to ask you all to submit any questions to me. I hope to have this done before the end of June. Submit any questions to me that you would like to ask Bruce. We're not asking him, "Could you please exposit Revelation 3:20?" (*Laughter.*) That's not what we're asking him to do. We're asking about him as a person.

I am very curious about him. I'm curious about anyone who in the faith has reached the maturity, when he obviously leads a very disciplined and focused life. And I want to find out more about Bruce, because I want to get as much from him as long as I can. Okay, so with that in—Yes?

Participant: Ted, this is just a thought. Did you ever consider doing it with us there, in a circle or—

Ted: I'm not opposed to doing it in a group. Here's my concern. Bruce is a private person. I probed him on these questions, some of them previously. And he keeps his cards close to his vest. So I would sooner do it in that setting than with you all.

Participant: That's wise.

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Ted: Yes, because I want to be able to—I mean that one of the things I do for a living is to interview hundreds and hundreds of people for the purposes of fundraising and community organization. I know how to do the interview and how to get the information. So I appreciate you saying that. I would rather try it this way.

I have some slips of paper here, if anyone wants to write a question and hand it to me. Here they are. Don't all rush for it. *(Laughter.)*

Participant: There's also a basket of pens right by—

Ted: Yeah, right. Yes, that's good. So, I mean, think about it. What would you like to ask Bruce and have him share from his own character and his walk with the Lord?

Participant: Can we give them to you next week?

Ted: *(mock voice of exasperation.)* Oh, okay. That's fine. Just kidding. *(Laughter.)*

Participant: Are you on Linked In, if anyone wanted to—

Ted: I am on Linked In, right. I don't look at it very often, but I am on Linked In, as I am on Facebook. But thank you for noting that.

Okay. Here we go. Now you received quite a bit of notes here, didn't you? And somebody is saying, "How are we going to get through all this?" But what I wanted to do here is that, when I study the Word and I study theological or doctrinal questions, or the application, I'm very curious.

I think maybe I shared with you when I was fortunate enough, blessed enough, to go, assigned by my company, to spend a year and a half in England, and did a project at Cambridge University. I worked with a lot of the dons and the fellows, as they called the professors at the University. And I found out that those fellows—they're actually called fellows—those fellows wanted funding for curiosity driven research. They were curious about things, whether it was physics or chemistry or English or history, or any other subject, like psychology. They wanted funds so they could research the things that kind of drove their curiosity.

I get very curious about things in the Bible and about things in doctrine. And I began to take them in my mind and I would lay awake at night, turning them around like a Rubik's Cube, trying to make the things all line up.

As you can see, this is what I did here with the first and the second page there—the two readings. We're dealing now in Galatians 1 and 2. And I put a parallel in Acts 9, 11 and 15. And what these parallel columns do is that they try to make sense of Paul's experience with the apostles in Jerusalem.

And somebody here, I'm sure, has studied this more than I have. And the deeper I got into this, the more my mind just began to spin, because I tried to make sense of it all. But Paul tells one story in Galatians 1 and 2, and there's another story told by Luke in Acts 9, 11 and 15. And what I've tried to do is to make sense of that.

I will say from the beginning that the issue, to boil it all down, the issue is, did Paul make two visits to see the apostles, or did he make three? And traditionally, Galatians 2 and Acts 15 are linked together. I see it as three visits to the apostles. That's the conclusion I've come to. I will tell you that there are evangelical scholars who agree with both sides. It's not like the bad guys believe in one view and the good guys believe in another.

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But let me march you through this story. This pretty much takes us from the time of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus all the way to the time that he went to Jerusalem and presented the question before the apostles from the church in Antioch sent him down to Jerusalem with Barnabas. And they asked the apostles the question. Do you have to be circumcised in order to be saved? So this covers this. So I'm going to plow through it very quickly, and then get to the four applications at the end. That's really the meat of what I'm trying to say.

Okay. At the very top, *Sources of the Information*. Well, in Galatians the source of the information that we receive is that it came by revelation. Paul says, "*But I received it through revelation.*" "The gospel that I received did not come from man; it was not man's gospel. But I received it by revelation."

On the other hand, Luke says that when he wrote Luke and Acts, (and he wrote both of them), that he received a lot of information from "*eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word*" who delivered this data, this information, about Paul and about the church, the apostles, Peter, the beginnings of the church—he received it from ministers of the Word and eyewitnesses.

So we have, on one hand, Paul's personal experience of a revelation, and on the other hand Luke, the story from eyewitnesses.

So we'll drop down to *The Immediate Aftermath of Paul's Conversion*. Stay in the Acts column. After Paul was converted, the disciples led him by the hand and brought Paul to Damascus, and he rose and was baptized. We immediately go to the left, to Galatians 1:16 and 17. And after he was baptized, "*I did not immediately consult with anyone, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me.*" So this is immediately after his conversion and his baptism.

So from there, what happens? Well, Acts is somewhat quiet at that point. But we learn from Paul that in Galatians 1:17—are you with me on the Galatians side?—"*I went away into Arabia.*"

Now we don't know what he was doing in Arabia. I mean, this is a great mystery. People have speculated. They've speculated that he went there to receive further revelation or insight, to meditate or to think. The Arabian Peninsula is a very popular place for people historically throughout the church to go and meditate and commune with God. But we don't know.

Then it says in 1:17, "*And then I returned into Damascus.*" Now at this point we move. After being in Damascus, we have the first Jerusalem visit. He says on the Galatians side—1:18—"*Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas. But I saw none of the other apostles.*" And on the Acts side, Acts 9—I'm coming halfway down there, if you're following me on the Acts side; see 9:26-27—but Barnabas brought him to the apostles and he declared to them how he had seen the Lord who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

Then we plow through the next thing that happened, and that is Galatians 1:22, also Acts 9:21. And they're saying that the people in Jerusalem were fearful of him. The churches were fearful of him because he had persecuted the church, reasonably enough.

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Okay. From there, then it says in Galatians 1:21 and Acts 9:30, that he went from Syria and Cilicia, which is where Tarsus is. And thank goodness Acts agrees with that. The brothers brought him down to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus. So we have him in the same place.

And then, once he's in Tarsus, in Asia Minor—present day Turkey,—Paul headquarters himself in Antioch and begins teaching there. So early after his conversion, he did quite a bit of teaching, preaching and declaring that Jesus is the Son of God. He did that in Damascus. Later he went to Jerusalem to be presented to at least some of the apostles. And then he goes on to go back to Antioch, where he did teaching there.

From there, we hear about the famine relief collection in Acts 11:28. Agabus, one of the Jerusalem prophets, stood up and foretold that there would be a great famine over all the world. So the disciples determined to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

So at that point the church decides through Agabus' revelation, through his prophecy, that there would be a great famine, and they want to supply the needs of the church in Jerusalem and Judea, which they do. And we learn about that very briefly in Acts 11:30 and in Acts 12:30. But the content of that is found in Galatians 2:1-10.

"Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation, and set before them privately the gospel that I proclaimed among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running in vain, or had not run in vain." And I'm going to talk later about what I believe actually happened on that second Jerusalem visit, which was very important.

So in the first Jerusalem visit, Paul is presented by Barnabas. Barnabas gives a report on Paul's preaching. "Don't be nervous or anxious about this fellow. He's doing a lot of good things." And on the second Jerusalem visit, Paul is able to go into more detail about his gospel.

Then I believe that Paul and Barnabas went on to Paul's first missionary journey. You see that in Acts 13:5. Are you with me? Okay. Barnabas, Paul and Mark—called John Mark—they preach in Salamis, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium—all of these places are in Asia Minor, present day Turkey—Lystra, Perga. And it says in 14:26 that they *"sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled."*

And in Antioch they have the problem that some men came up from Judea to Antioch. They were teaching that unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved. Basically, unless you follow the Jewish law, or do what we might say are good works, you can't be saved. Paul and Barnabas were appointed to go up to Jerusalem. They were appointed by the church in Antioch to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question.

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders. Peter stood up and said to them, *"We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus."* And all of the assembly fell silent. They listened to Barnabas and Paul explain the situation. And after they finished speaking, James replied, *"My judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who have turned to God, but we should write to them."* And then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

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So the decision of the council of the apostles and elders—in fact, it says the whole church—the decision was that they would not require Gentiles or anyone to follow Jewish law in order to be saved.

Okay, that's a quick run through. That was pretty good, wasn't it? It took about ten minutes. Was that confusing?

Participant: No.

Ted: This took me days of wrestling with, to kind of come to terms with it. But I want to pull some things out of what we just read here. I want to pull some key teaching applications from this whole story, because it's a very important story. I mean, after the council in Jerusalem, the church is never the same, because I think that at that point the gospel becomes very clear, the content of the gospel.

The first thing I want to point out, and the thing that strikes me, especially in Paul's writings in Galatians 1 and 2, is that Paul was *single-minded, focused, and not distracted*. This was a gift. Paul was totally grasped and embraced by Jesus, and grasped by the whole idea of the gospel, and the radical idea that you could not be saved except through the free gift of God. And there was nothing you could add to that or give to that process.

Participant: Amen.

Ted: I mean, we take that for granted. But you cannot imagine how revolutionary this was. And to hold on to that teaching and that understanding in the midst of a whole different understanding, even in the church, would have taken a focused, totally committed and totally captivated individual to persist in that belief.

I know that I've shared this story before. But when we once went on a missionary trip to Turkey, we were left alone by our missionary friend who was going to the University of Istanbul. In the courtyard of the University of Istanbul, shortly after we were there—I apologize; I hate retelling stories; it could get boring!—but while we were there, we began to be surrounded by several of the students who wanted to practice English on us. Once they found out that we were Americans, they wanted to practice English, which is great.

But one of them said to me,—a very bright guy; his English was excellent!—he said, "May I ask you some questions about religion?"

And I said, "Yes! You're asking the right person!" (*Laughter.*) "You've come to the right place!" (*Laughter.*) I mean, you may think that's pride. But why have I studied this stuff for all these years unless it's for an opportunity like this, okay?

So he began to talk about issues like, "When you do your baptisms, do you put people into the water? Do you sprinkle them?" He got into Christmas. He got into all these things.

I said, "You know, these are all secondary questions. There is really a more primary issue here. May I share that with you?"

And he said, "Well, yes." And it turns out that he was a very devout Muslim.

And I said to him, "There are two things about the Christian faith that make it different from every other religion in the world." Now I had his attention. He was very interested.

And he said, "What are they?"

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And I said, "First of all, Christianity is the only faith or religion in the world of which it's Founder—I'm using these terms loosely—claimed to be God. No other religious faith in the whole world has a Founder who claims to be God." Jesus is called *"the Founder and Perfecter of our faith"* in Hebrews.

Participant: *"The Pioneer."*

Ted: Okay. I think he knew that. And he probably felt that was an inaccurate understanding on my part. But the second thing I said was, "Christianity is the only faith in which your salvation"—going to Paradise for the Muslim—"is not a matter of anything you do. It's a free gift. It cannot be earned or deserved."

Well, this stunned the guy. I mean, he had probably been taught by different Muslim leaders that the issues were that we worship three gods and things like that. But he had never thought about that. And I explored that whole question with him. But we can't overestimate how radical that thinking is, because the whole bulk of humanity—in fact, as Bishop Rodgers has said, the default position for all humanity—is to earn your salvation. And for Paul to hold on to a different gospel from what others were teaching—that theirs was the false gospel; we've come to find that this is the true gospel—this took an amazing character.

I guess what I would say is this. I can never aspire to be that singly minded and focused. I am way too distracted in my life. I get down on my knees to pray and my mind goes every which way. I should be spending time talking with the Lord about the family and things. And all at once, my mind is thinking about this teaching and bouncing all over the place. You know, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing."
"Prone to wander, Lord; I feel it; Prone to leave the God I love."

It's in the hymn. I am very prone to wander all the time. And I get easily distracted. And if I'm working on a project for work, I have to stop after about an hour and do something silly because I can't stay focused. Some of you are much better than that, and I admire you for it.

But I think about people who are that focused. Are you familiar with Jim and Elizabeth Elliott's "Through Gates of Splendor?" You read Jim Elliott's stuff. He went to the Auca Indians in Peru, was it not?—in the jungles. He and four other fellows went to a tribe that had killed every outsider. They went there and they, too, were speared to death. I mean, it's a tremendous story.

And if you read Jim Elliott's story, and if you read Jim Elliott's writings, even when he was in college,—I believe he went to Wheaton,—that man is focused and totally sold out! "I surrender all." I make fun of that song. But the fact of the matter is that I think there are some people who get to that point. I don't ever aspire to do that. But Paul had that kind of focus.

I think once again about the missionaries who we spent time with in Turkey. Those folks were totally focused. And this is what focused and dedicated meant—sold out; singly minded. This is what it meant in reality. I knew missionaries who were in Turkey for twenty-five years and didn't hardly see a single convert! And they still kept doing it day in and day out.

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When we stayed with one of the missionaries, Margaret, she told us, "Many of us come to Turkey with a coffin on our backs." Do you get the meaning of that? When they came there, they said, "We're going to turkey, and the only way we're coming home"—England—"is in a coffin," because we are totally focused on this."

Now I'm glad to tell you that as a result of that kind of single-minded dedication, the kind of dedication that Paul had, the result is that Christianity is now growing in turkey! And where there were maybe only three, four, five churches seven decades ago, there may be three hundred now, and great things are happening! There are people in Turkey, probably the least evangelized country in the Middle East, a population of seventy million, maybe a hundred thousand Christians, if you count evangelicals, Orthodox and Catholics,—that's all. And it used to be the great center of the churches in the book of Revelation, and all these churches we talk about here. It's finally coming back! But it took someone who said, "I'm going over there. And if I never see a single person converted, I'm going to continue to preach the gospel."

Participant: Amen.

Ted: So, Lord, give each one of us this kind of single-mindedness. And you know, finally, in terms of being single-minded and focused, not easily distracted, I think about Bruce Bickel.

Participant: Oh, amen!

Ted: I mean, have you watched him? I watch him very carefully—the way he functions and communicates and interacts. Do you know when Sig's up here making lots of funnies, which I think is great? Yeah, we laugh so hard sometimes that we could almost cry. But the fact is, you watch Bruce. Bruce hardly cracks a smile, because Bruce is thinking about the teaching. He is focused on that. He's not allowing himself to be indulged in any distractions up to that point. So we're very fortunate. That's why I want to learn more about this guy.

"One thing I do," Paul writes in Philippians, "forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize and the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." And I just want to go once again to Galatians 2:16. This radical gospel, this thing that was so different from the default position of the world, from every other religion of the world. The default position of the world is that I must earn my salvation in some fashion. Paul says in Galatians 2:16, "We know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."

Now if you were to take that sentence and break it up, he says the same thing three times! He says it again and again and again, and that is that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. We take it for granted. I'm telling you, brothers, this is a radical, other worldly understanding of the relationship with God.

Okay. That's the first thing that kind of struck me. I was very struck by how focused and single-minded and wrapped up and surrendered Paul was. The second thing that struck me is that *opposition will be constant to the truth. But "he who endures to the end will be saved."* I'm telling you, if you buy into the gospel and you are seized by the Good

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Shepherd, and He goes out and picks you up and puts you on His shoulder and brings you back into the fold, if you have that experience, if you have the experience of the new life in Christ, and all of a sudden the things of God become important to you when they were not important before, I am promising you that you will be opposed all the time, and there will be no letup. You may get a breather here and there. But this is not something for those who want prosperity and healing. This is for those who are grasped by the truth and want the truth more than they want the pleasures and the benefits of this life.

So we see this in Galatians 2:4—the internal opposition, false brothers secretly brought in, *"who slipped in to spy out our freedom."* What he's saying is, "My gosh! I'm with the apostles. I'm in Jerusalem. And my gosh, we still have these guys coming in! And they're still trying to mess up the gospel!"

He'll give his talk about Galatians 2:16. We know that we're justified not by works, but by faith in Jesus Christ. He's there. He lays it out. Everybody's nodding like this. There's this camp that comes over from the other side, and they start talking about how you need to do something to get saved. They cannot let it go! And Satan inspires these people to come in and create problems continuously. So it's an internal problem. But these people are bringing another cursed gospel.

This is *not* good news. It is not good news to believe that you're saved by how well you do. I know I'm driving this into the ground. But you know, I've shared this story before, too. I had a conversation with a Mormon missionary. And he talked about the fact that they don't get forgiven unless they repent. And to repent means never to do it again. So if you repent, it is not true repentance unless you never do it again.

So I was living in Virginia Beach at the time. These were two young guys, and I'm sure that their testosterone levels were firmly high. And I said, "Well, have you guys ever been down to the beach while you're here at Virginia Beach?"

And they said, "Well, yes, we have."

I said, "Well, have you ever gone down to the beach and seen a young woman go by with a white bikini with a great tan?"

And they said, "Well, yeah, I guess so."

"Well, did you ever lust in your heart?"

"Yeah, we did." (*Laughter.*)

"Did you ever repent of it?"

"Yeah, we repented of it!"

"Did you ever do it again?" (*Long pause. Laughter.*)

And I said to them, "You don't have good news. You have bad news, because you are lost, lost, lost, if it depends on you. (*A participant raises his hand.*) I'm on a roll now. I'm not taking questions.

Participant: Okay.

Ted: No, go ahead. (*Laughter.*)

Participant: I talked to someone, one of my teachers when I was in Homestead, who was a Mormon.

Ted: Yes.

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Participant: And I just confronted him, hopefully in love. But I said, "Do you agree with Joseph Smith that Jesus is the spirit brother of Lucifer?"

And he said, "Yes. We all are."

And I said, "Do you realize the ramifications of that? Do you realize that we who are evangelical Christians would regard that as rank blasphemy?"

Ted: And he said?

Participant: Well, he didn't say much.

Ted: But you see, the thing is because Lucifer and Jesus and you all have the chance to work hard enough to be good enough to get to the heavenly kingdom.

Participant: Right.

Ted: That's what they would say. I mean, what this does every time is that it dumbs down God's holiness and it exalts man's goodness. That's what it does every time. You watch this happen every time. I mean, it's so predictable. I wish Satan had a new trick in his bag. But he doesn't, because it's always this. Think less of God's holiness. Boys will be boys. Girls will be girls. Humans will be humans. "I know you did a bad thing. Just toddle off and play in heavenly fields. It's going to be fine." God's holiness gets dumbed down and man's goodness gets brought up. Yes?

Participant: Doesn't Paul remark, though,--and I wish I could quote it exactly. But he says, "Let's perform acts that reflect repentance."

Ted: Yes.

Participant: Something to that effect. After you repent, let's do things that show that you have repented.

Ted: Absolutely.

Participant: And live that way.

Ted: Right.

Participant: It doesn't mean it's negating you by "repent again."

Ted: Yeah.

Participant: But isn't that the—

Ted: Absolutely. We need to do those things. But it's not going to get us there.

Participant: Right.

Ted: It's because we have been changed and we desire to repent. And repenting is saying, "I'm wrong. God is right." That's what repenting is. I'm wrong. God is right. And every time we say that, even though we repent, and we know we're going to do it again in all likelihood we'd be lying if we say, "Well, I'm trying not to." Dang gone it, you're going to do it again. You know you're going to do it again. But in the end I've got to come back every time and say, "God is right. I'm wrong. God, change me." That's what we say.

And so we see that Paul not only had internal opposition. I went through Acts. I said, "My gosh!" I just sailed through Acts. I just did a quick survey of those first fifteen chapters. And look what they say. *"They arrested them and put them in custody."* *"They arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison."* Are you with me on that? Do you see where I am? That should be 2B, I believe. *"They were enraged and wanted to kill them."* *"They cast Stephen out of the city and stoned him."* *"The Jews plotted to kill Paul."* *"Herod killed James with the sword, and he proceeded to arrest Peter also."* *"The*

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Jews stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of their district." "An attempt was made to mistreat and stone them." "They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city."

I mean, welcome to the Christian life! You're not only going to get it from your colleagues at work and your family and friends, and the crazy uncle that comes over at Christmas. You're not only going to get it from them. And you're going to get it in the church. But you're going to get the world out to kill you!

So to join up, to sign the recruitment papers, to join God's army, to become one with the bride of Christ, is a foreboding task, and humanly, totally repugnant. Why would anyone want to put themselves through all this, except that their hearts had been changed?

Participant: I struggle with Hebrews 12:4, which says, "*In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding of blood.*" So I get grace, and that we're saved through the Person and the work of perfection that Christ carried out, that He did the Ten commandments and that we have to abide in Him, and that it's a double imputation of his goodness to us and our sinfulness to Him. So I get all that. However, how do you put Hebrews 12:4 against that?

Ted: Well, why would that be a contradiction? Bill?

Bill: If you look at the verse in context, it seems to me that *sin* there is the persecution of God's elect. And you haven't suffered to that point where your blood has been shed through persecution.

Ted: Well, that's one understanding, and that would be a good understanding. I guess I'm not prepared to dig into it because I haven't thought about it. I mean, that Rubik's Cube has not been turned around in my brain. Okay.

Participant: Good question.

Ted: Well, it's a good question. Okay. Those are two things. One was the focus and the single-mindedness of Paul. I pray that God would give us that. The second was opposition, internally and externally.

#3. I don't want to do #3 first. I want to do #4 first. *In the end, personal revelation must be validated by the whole church.* I am not impressed that Paul had a revelation, unless that revelation is supported by the church as a whole.

Joseph Smith had a great revelation in 1830. He went to a glade to pray. I think it was 1820. The Book of Mormon came out in 1830. He went to a glade to pray. And he saw heavenly beings. He had a huge revelation and he had several other revelations after that. And the whole Mormon church is based on that revelation. And what is the authority that validates that revelation? What makes that true?

Well, I brought a Book of Mormon with me. And I've got here, in the beginning of it, The Testimony of Three Witnesses. So first of all, they have the testimony of three witnesses and the testimony of eight witnesses. And these people say that what Joseph Smith is saying is true. The witnesses are Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris—all highly suspect individuals—family members and close friends.

And yet the whole "truth" about Mormonism is based upon a revelation that we believe is blasphemous in the extreme degree. There is probably no other major faith in

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America today that is more repugnant to the Christian faith—the true apostolic faith—than the Mormon faith. They teach things that are bizarre beyond understanding—that, for instance, God has a physical body made, as they say, "of matter too fine for us to see", that God the Father gave birth to Jesus after having sexual relations with Mary, that there are many gods, and each god has a wife, and when they achieve perfection, each one is given his own universe to rule over. All of these are their teachings. And, by the way, you don't see this in the TV ads.

So how do we know that's not true? It's because there is no authoritative approval of what was said. Yes?

Participant: I had a friend in our church in Bethlehem, PA a number of years ago. And when I saw him, he told me about how he had been involved in the Mormon church.

Ted: Yes.

Participant: And I said, "How can you believe all that stuff?"

And he said, "Listen! I wasn't interested in that. These are good people who take good care of each other."

Ted: Well, that's right.

Participant: And then I thought, "Well, why aren't we doing that?"

Ted: Right. Well, we can do that. But here's the bottom line. American Christianity is very fond of what pragmatically works. They're not very interested in doctrine and basic teaching, the basics. So if you become a Mormon and you've got a better family life, then golly day, that's what I want to be a part of. And it doesn't make any difference whether there are gods and multiples of gods, and that God is having sex with Mary. That's all irrelevant, because the thing that really counts is that it works. And I'm afraid that infects a lot of evangelical Christianity as well.

Participant: And that's the thing I see on TV every day. The world news lifts up, exalts the success stories.

Ted: Right.

Participant: They do this every day. And that's all we know in America—what works. And to come along and say what you've just said would be a stumbling block.

Ted: Right. It would be a stumbling block. And I'm thinking about this especially in terms of the whole issue of "gay marriage." Now that the Supreme Court has indicated that there's no impediment to having states marry same sex couples, what is the argument that we're hearing? We're hearing, "Well, you said it was going to be terrible. You Christians said it would be catastrophic. Well, what's happened? Nothing has happened. I mean, we all know gay couples that are very nice and good people. So what's the problem, Christians?"

The problem is that we're starting at a secondary or third level in the working out of things, and we're not dealing with the basic issue of sexuality and the reason for the difference between male and female and this kind of thing. But I'm just saying that it's shot through everything. You cannot get into an argument or a discussion with anybody where it doesn't come down to "but it works! What's the problem, Ted? It works!"

It's interesting that to validate a testimony, if you ask a Mormon why he knows that this book is true, he will say it's true because he has—what's the expression? A burning in

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his bosom. And it says in the Book of Mormon that if you doubt about this testimony, this revelation, then pray to God and you will receive what's called the burning in the bosom. And I have no idea what that means. It must mean good feelings about something.

Participant: Or indigestion.

Ted: Well, it could be either one. *(Laughter.)* But I want to point out here—bear with me!—I want to point out that I said that a private revelation has no value unless it is confirmed by authority. And that's what we get in Galatians and in Acts. Paul says in Galatians 2:2, *"I set before them"*—that is, the apostles—*"I set before them the gospel."* Remember, it's this radical new gospel, that you're saved not by works, but by faith in Jesus Christ. *"in order to make sure that I was not running in vain, or had not run in vain."* "I wanted these people who were the eyewitnesses to Jesus, who were the acknowledged leaders of the church,—I wanted to place this before them to be sure that they would say, 'Hey, Paul, you've got this all wrong. You've been running in vain. You've been wasting your time. It's been an empty exercise. It's been vain.'" *Chaos* in the Greek—empty.

And that's not what they said. They listened and they said, "This is true." We see that in Acts 15. *"It seemed good to the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send the following letters. The brothers, both the apostles and elders, have come to one accord. And it seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden upon you than these requirements."* And this gets into it. But Peter stated that *"we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ."*

So whatever Paul had, it was validated. And that's an important point. Do you see what I'm saying? Are you catching the import of what I've said? I mean, we have a lot of people today who say, "The Lord told me to do this, or that, or whatever." I want to know who's authority it's under.

I had a fellow who came to me. And he said, "You know, Ted, I understand that you're involved in a church plant. Why don't you tell me about it. I want to start a church."

I said, "By whose authority are you doing that?"

He said, "Jesus'." You see what I'm saying? It doesn't mean anything to say that Jesus told me to do it. It has to be confirmed by Jesus' body to be of value.

Participant: Ted, are you talking about the present-day church?

Ted: Yes, absolutely. Yes, right. Nothing has changed. Yes, Jim?

Jim: The Scripture, too. Would you add that?

Ted: Well, you would have to have Scriptural basis. But Jehovah's Witnesses have lots of Scripture to throw out. In the end, there are the apostles, who were the eyewitnesses and who were with Jesus His whole life, as it says in Acts. And they were the ones to whom Paul brought his gospel, so that he was not running in vain or had not run in vain. And they declare at Jerusalem, on the third visit, that Paul's gospel was correct, that indeed you do not need to be circumcised to be saved, but you're saved by faith. And they gave him the right hand of fellowship. And they said, "Now you go out and preach this to the Gentiles." Yes?

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Participant: A clarification. Whenever you say that it has to be confirmed by the body and confirmed by the church, you mean the body of the elders, the deacons, the proper structure there—not necessarily a denomination.

Ted: Well, I mean, I don't even want to get into that question, because I would love to get into it, but it wouldn't be edifying at this point, because Bruce comes out of an independent Congregational Baptist background. That's not me. I have a different point of view of where the authority comes from. But generally speaking, we both would agree that it would have to come out of the church. For Baptists it comes out of the congregation. For those of us who are part of the historic churches, it's out of a bigger body than that. Yes, Jim?

Jim: For instance, there's the issue of Luther. I mean, there was Luther who came up with the Ninety-five Theses.

Ted: Yeah.

Jim: But in some respects he was going back to the early church.

Ted: Exactly right And it's interesting to note that Luther never left his church. We have lots of people who are eager to leave their churches. Luther never left his church. He put the Ninety-five Theses—his statement of what became for us the Protestant faith, the Reformed faith—on the church door at Wittenberg in 1517. In 1520 the Pope said "You must renounce your teaching, or I will excommunicate you. You have sixty days to do it."

And the time passed. And in January of 1521, the Pope excommunicated him. He threw him out of the church. Yes?

Participant: Luther always appealed to "the Pope better informed." In other words, he thought of himself as helping the Pope do his job.

Ted: Right. Exactly.

Participant: And he took that stance to the very end. He never intended to form a denomination. He was simply trying to get the church back to what it stood for.

Ted: Right. You're exactly right. And in the twentieth century, you were involved in the Lutheran/Anglican dialogue, Bishop. But even in the twentieth century, in the discussions between the Roman Church and the Lutherans, they asked the Roman Church to lift the excommunication. And the Roman Church would not do it. So Luther remains perpetually excommunicated from that church.

Do you see what I'm saying? We are often quick to leave a church. But most of the early Reformers were excommunicated from those churches. They got thrown out. They did not leave it.

And why did they stay in those churches? I think I'm going to wrap up here. I have this whole other section, but I'll try to summarize it. They stayed with those churches basically for two reasons. #1. They believed in the unity of the body of Christ. They believed that you do not divorce from the church unless it is doing things that are heretical.

And the second thing is, you don't know whether you are absolutely right or wrong. People say, "I know this is the truth. I've got the way and I'm going to get out of this place." Well, you know, you may be wrong. We're fallen sinners. We have original sin. So

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we may have gotten that wrong. Maybe God needs time for us to stay in that group in order to get edified ourselves.

And the third thing is to be a testimony to that group, to stand there and be a witness. And a lot of us don't have the patience to do that. I think that, even with the bishop in the Episcopal church, that battle started in about 1960, or maybe earlier.

Bishop Rodgers: Yes, and I declared it to be in seminary. *(Laughter.)*

Ted: But the point is that you did not desert the church. In the end, I did not renounce my vows. I was thrown out. And the same would be true there. But believe me, you can't do that unless you believe that the unity of the church is right below the truth. The truth is the most important thing. And then underneath that comes the peace of the church. Remember, Bruce talked about *pure and peaceable*, when we ended up with the teaching in 1 Peter. He talked about wisdom being "*pure and peaceable*." Absolutely, the truth trumps everything. But shortly thereafter, there comes the *peaceable*—being in union with the rest of the believers. And we don't think that's very important. Yes, Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: I probably should say that I never really left. I was just transported to another part of the Anglican communion.

Ted: Right. But I had my orders removed by the others. I got you, yeah. They forgot me on the first excommunication list. *(Laughter.)* Actually, they sent me a second letter. They said, "These three or four people we missed on the first go-round." *(Laughter.)*

Do you understand what I'm saying? We're so eager to get out when things don't seem to be going our way. Or we don't think it's pure enough. Well, okay. It probably is not pure enough. But neither are you. So if you want to get out and start a new group, that brings your impurity to the next group. Just things to think about.

I'm going to wrap up right there. Any questions?

Participant: What about #3? *(Laughter.)*

Ted: I was getting into #3. I'm sorry. I just get so involved in research of this subject.

Participant: I think you said it. But with any contribution from the church, the church can be wrong.

Ted: Right. The church can be wrong.

Participant: And, you know, I'm going back to when Paul came before--didn't he come before the other apostles?

Ted: Yes.

Participant: And these were established as God's representatives.

Ted: Right. That's correct.

Participant: So that when he brought the gospel and they discussed the issue, they gave him the right hand of fellowship.

Ted: Yes. Right.

Participant: Well, I don't know of anybody in the church today who is an apostle and who has that same authority.

Ted: Well, see, that's why I didn't want to get into that, because there are two different views on that, okay? But the point is this. (I forgot what I was going to say; it was something very profound.) *(Laughter.)* I guess I'm—

Participant: Ultimately, what I'm saying is that even the church—

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Ted: Can be in error.

Participant: Yes.

Ted: Absolutely.

Participant: And they have to subject themselves to truth.

Ted: Absolutely.

Participant: And if they don't do this, then—

Ted: Over time.

Participant: Over time.

Ted: I'm just saying over time. You know, what happens is that sometimes, with folks like Paul, they get ahead of the curve in a sense. The church has to catch up to them. And I have to think about this. I have a bunch of historic examples here.

You know the Council of Nicea—the Nicene Creed, the great statement of the truth of the Person of Christ and who He is—"God of God, Light of Light," and all that. That council met in 321. And yet they were still fighting over it two hundred years later in one aspect or another! It took a while for the church to catch up. But people didn't leave the church. They stayed in there and were witnesses. Bishop, one last word.

Bishop Rodgers: I guess what I want to say is that God will not permit the total failure of His church. He will always be reforming His church. So therefore, if there is ever a division, it's only provision to what God is going to do finally to reunite His people into one body. That's the conviction called the *indefectibility of the church*. It's based on God's grace and mercy. And so, while one may be separated from another part of the body at some point, saying that they are messing up the gospel, that's still only provisional. In the end, you have to believe that all true believers will be united again.

Ted: Let us pray. Lord God, we thank You for this mystery, this great mystery that You call the church, and that You gave Your life for it, and that through the work of the church many may be saved and come to know You, and have that new life in Christ. Renew each one of us. Point out our errors and perfect us, as You promised. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Men: Amen. (*Applause.*)