

January 29, 2011

## After You've Done Everything To Take A Stand, Then Stand Firm

Mike: My first assignment in the Navy was in a helicopter squadron in San Diego. Shortly after I arrived there, an officer named "Pete," who'd been assigned to a detachment operating off the coast of Vietnam, returned to the squadron. The Commanding Officer of the ship he was stationed on had relieved Pete of duty because he'd refused to take part in the hazing that's inflicted on Navy personnel during the "Shell Back" Ceremony. This is a traditional rite of passage when personnel cross the Equator for the first time, and it's intended to be humiliating.

Pete had gone through the hazing himself years earlier, but his own conscience dictated that he couldn't inflict the same indignity on others. The Commanding Officer cited him for lack of "upholding Navy tradition", and he wanted Pete's career ended. Pete's story interested me, so I spent time getting to know him after his return to the squadron. This was one of those milestone encounters you have in life in which you question what you would've done if you were in his shoes. It also brought back personal memories, since I'd been ridiculed as a senior in high school for not hazing freshmen even though I'd readily been hazed myself as one.

The consequences to Pete's decision were far more serious than the mockery I'd faced as a teen. But in light of this man's stand for integrity, I realized that I too could not inflict humiliating hazing on others. While I went through the Shell Back Ceremony myself, I was never in the position of crossing the Equator again and having to humiliate other Navy personnel. That might have been a career-ending crossing for me as well.

The fruit of courage: There's a great resolution to this story, though! The Commanding Officer of our squadron *didn't* ruin Pete's career. Instead, he held an all-officers' meeting to discuss the whole Shell Back Ceremony tradition. It turned out that while the other officers were willing to endure it themselves, many really didn't want to have to shame anyone else. As a result of this discussion, our CO sent a letter to the Commanding Officers of the eleven ships on which our squadron detachments were stationed. He informed them that *no* personnel from our squadron could be compelled to haze anyone while onboard a ship. His letter stood firm.

Let's carry the objective of this story forward. During our years of ministry we've encountered many who realized that a lot of what was taking place within their congregation gatherings was in fact unbiblical. But while the circumstances riled them enough to bad mouth the leadership or to flee quietly, they resisted taking a stand to bring into question the unbiblical methodology or practices. You don't have to read very far in the Newer Testament to recognize that standing firm for our Lord and His Word is integral to following Jesus. That kind of commitment isn't optional! *"My righteous one will live by trust. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him"* (Hebrews 10:38; see

also Luke 12:4-9).

That ecclesiastical systems have been compromised by pagan practices and have altered biblical truth into worldly patterns is no surprise: *"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons"* (1 Timothy 4:1). Every system, whether religious or government, relies on "indoctrinated" people who won't rock the boat. Those entangled in organized systems are dedicated to *keeping things going even to the point of violating their conscience*. Seminary-trained clergy are trained to maintain a smooth running, problem-free congregation. Why? Because the people placidly comfortable in the pew want it that way. Controversy and confrontation make them edgy, and standing up for what's biblically right just isn't "Christian."

Most of you know this: If you're going to remain in the comfort zone of a denominational congregation, then you have to stay passive and agreeable. But realize this. You're giving way to the toxicity of fear! *Fear of ostracism* by both congregational leadership as well as complacent, fellow pewsitters compels you to keep silent. *Any community of people, even a family, who are held together by the fear of ostracism have created their own dark comfort zone.* Their unspoken motto is painfully self-serving:

***"Don't confront my darkness, and I won't confront yours;  
Don't stand up for Jesus, and I won't either."***

Fear-based motivations more accurately hallmark contemporary western Christianity than do the love-based motives of Christ that inspire a person to take a stand for Him and His Word. There's a comfortable familiarity among those who complacently occupy pews together each Sunday; they're captive to *the same* demonic and toxic strongholds. But if you have ears to hear what the Spirit of Christ has made so clear throughout the Bible, you'll detach yourself from this lethargic comfort zone! You'll press on in Him and rid yourself of EVERY demonic and toxic stronghold that interferes with you taking a stand for our Lord Jesus and the truth of His Word (Matthew 10:32).

How do you take a stand for Jesus? You make sure you're no longer controlled by *any* Christ-denying toxic memories of past rejection by anyone. In the obedient trust that pours from your love for your Father and our Lord Jesus, you take up your cross and follow Him. You turn to the love-based motivations in your brain that have replaced the fear-based, toxic ones. You refuse to cower and sidestep the Person of Christ, casting off the pattern of those who are dominated by the thorny dark strongholds that imprison them.

But keep this in mind: You never *stand against* any individual (Ephesians 6:12), because that focus will only embitter you. Rather, *it's the truth and the Person of Jesus that you stand for.* While on earth He took His stand *for* His Father and *for* His Father's will for His life—and was hated for it by both the religious system and the world (see

John 15:18-25). Should you expect any greater acceptance if you're walking in His steps?

**It Only Takes One Righteous Person To Take A Stand**  
***"Like a muddied spring or a polluted well***  
***is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked"***  
(Proverbs 25:26)

Taking a stand for what is right means *having God's perspective* and *responding accordingly*. Jonathan took a stand for righteousness with his armor bearer, and that courage caused the entire army of Israel to stand with him (1Samuel 14). Out of concern for God's integrity and reputation young David took a stand against the giant Goliath, inspiring the army of Israel to rise up and defeat the Philistines (1Samuel 17). These two men who trusted their God later entered into a covenant together, recognizing how their love for Him had stirred a righteous love for one another. They aren't alone in their devotion to their Lord. If you haven't done so recently, revisit Hebrews 11 and be inspired by the people whose faith caused them to stand no matter what the consequence. How's this for a daily motivation: That by His Spirit each and every one of us loves and trusts our Lord so that our names are listed with theirs one day!

Giving way to fear rather than overcoming fear by His Spirit in you is a prison that will keep you confined to hopelessness. Let's look at an example from history. *Kapos* were Jewish prisoners whom the Nazis used to keep the other Jews in the concentration camps in line. The German Gestapo were intent on keeping their death camps smoothly running. Because the *kapos* so greatly feared for their own lives, they even went so far as to coerce their own people into the gas chambers. "Fear of..." is the most crippling of maladies that plague mankind. However, there was one notable exception to *kapos* overcoming their own self-preservation fear—at Sobibor concentration camp in Poland. *Kapos* and prisoners united for the only mass escape from a death camp during World War II. It initially took one person to take a stand; then a few joined him, then more. Ultimately, hundreds overcame their fear of dying and found freedom.

In the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus, He is the Captain of the Hosts, a Mighty Warrior. Through His indwelling Spirit, His power is available to us, His redeemed. What does that mean in the encroaching darkness of a world bent on self-absorption and self-preservation? Do a word search for how often Scripture tells us, "Do not fear." Our Lord is looking for *one person* who doesn't succumb to fear any longer. He's looking for *two* who've exchanged their fear-captive thoughts and responses for love-based, sacrificial lives that fear nothing. He's looking for today's Josheb-basshebeths, Eleazars, and Shammahs—men who took a stand and are renowned in God's Word as "mighty." They served their king without regard for their own lives (2Samuel 23:8-17). Isn't that what being a "living sacrifice" means, turning from the self-protecting pattern of this world so that with a *renewed mind* we can fearlessly walk in our Father's will? (See Romans

12:1,2.)

***"I will give them singleness of heart and action,  
so that they will always fear Me for their own good  
and the good of their children after them"***

(Jeremiah 32:39)

If you don't come from a lineage of those who stood up in the face of opposition or death, then it's time to start for your family a heritage of standing firm for righteousness. To be a descendant of courageous people leaves an indelible mark in the conscience of your heart. You weigh your motives and actions by a standard that doesn't take fear of man or of consequences into consideration. Rather, you evaluate everything by whether it's the *right thing to do*. **What would Jesus do?**

Sue and I are grateful for the heritage that was passed along to us. When I first met Sue in high school I admired her as a person who had strong character. She didn't need to be a "groupie" like so many other girls in our school. Over time, my admiration turned to love, a love that's grown both in intensity and maturity. I discovered that Sue's ancestry went back to one of the men who risked his life and fortune to sign the Declaration of Independence. Josiah Bartlett from New Hampshire would be proud of Sue; his courage still remains.

I recall my immigrant grandparents who fled the atrocities of an evil czar. As best as we understand, my mother's father fled Poland because he was a military officer who refused to kill Jews as part of the czar's pogroms. Years after he became a farmer in eastern Connecticut, his wife died in 1932. His church leader ordered him to not let the black farmers who lived near him attend the funeral service. My grandfather knew how much these families loved his wife, however, and stood up for what was right. He drove those farmers to the church in his own car and sat them in the front pew with him.

I remember my Dad who with no hesitation jumped into a river to save me from drowning. My Mom, who worked as a parts inspector at an aircraft engine manufacturer, was several times threatened with being fired if she didn't pass certain parts that didn't meet specification. Standing firm for what was right, she refused to pass defective material—and went on to work there 32 years, continuing in integrity. Sue's Mom stood up against an unjust and illegal union strike, threatened with bodily harm when the car she was in was rolled over by strikers. These incidents and many more have been recounted to us as a legacy of not caving in to fear, and have become instilled in our character. Think of the character YOU can be passing on to your children and grandchildren that's worth far more than any material inheritance.

Doing what's right requires determination beforehand that you'll walk in obedient trust and take a stand for righteousness. Your heavenly Father knows if your heart is steadfast, and He will stand with you in Spirit. For too long throughout western

Christendom He's had to grieve over those who were quick to cave in to soulish fear, refusing to trust Him. Don't give way to the fear of those who mock you or exclude you because of your confident and absolute trust in Jesus as your Lord and in His Word as your unchanging standard. Lift up your head before Him and raise your arms in joyful thanks that He has called you His own! He has never denied you as His child; stand in confidence with the holy boldness of His love. Examine your heart: Is standing firm in Jesus more important to you than the next breath you take?

There are some simple things you can be doing now in taking a stand, especially on behalf of those you love. For instance, if these emails and teachings have strengthened and encouraged you, do you make copies of them to share with others, or forward them? Are you asking the Spirit to quicken these teachings in you in such a way that in your own words you can instruct others because you've put them into practice? How do your witness and actions represent to others what our Father in heaven is restoring today to His Church?

If what we share ends only with you, what a sad testimony. You know others who are faltering in fear and need you to come alongside and stand firm in Jesus with them. HE is the truth behind Paul's encouragement: "*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes*" (Ephesians 6:10,11). And when you are standing, don't flinch! "*The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world*" (1John 4:4).

It's time to stand up for our Lord Jesus and His Word while it is yet day.  
Standing with you in HIS faithfulness,

**Mike & Sue**