

Series: God & Our Culture #1486

Title: 2 Corinthians 2.15

Spiritual, Not Political Battles

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Let's start with a story. It is 5.40PM according to the clock on the dashboard in his car and Tim is driving the short distance from his home to where his parents live. He likes to be a little early for the get together he has with his parents and some family members a couple of times a month. Being early helps him feel more comfortable and allows him to get his favorite seat at the dining room table. Besides, for Tim, if he is not five minutes early then he feels as if he might as well not show up! He's a stickler for arriving on time. So, he has left his home with plenty of time to spare.

On his ride over the radio is on and he is humming the popular tune, but as he nears the street his parents live on, he starts to feel cautious and anxious. When he walks through the backdoor, he knows he has to be prepared for a conversation between seven people, only two of whom are Christians. One of those is himself. The other is his mother. The rest are not believers, even though Tim and his Mom desperately want them to be. In fact, one major motivating factor for this twice-monthly dinner is to find ways to talk about the gospel.

The problem is Tim's sister, Sarah and her husband Mike, are outspoken critics of Christians and the church because, in their mind, Christians are synonymous with political viewpoints and politicians they do not like. Really, policies and politicians whom they despise. And Sarah and Mike are parents, and therefore primary influencers of, two children. These are Tim's niece and nephew. They will also be at the dinner, assuming they manage to put down their phones and gaming devices long enough to eat. (This is not a given for teenagers.) Tim hopes the kids will be there, because his primary concern is for them, even more so than their parents.

Now, we need to know this about our friend Tim. He is not going to this family dinner to do battle over politics. He is going there because he loves these people. They are flesh and blood family and he wants to win them over to Jesus Christ, not the "conservative" Republican candidate for president, or state and local offices. It is not that Tim does not care at all about *policies*. As a Christian he is deeply troubled over any policy that enhances the moral corruption of his country. *But*, Tim just does not care about politicians and policies even anywhere close to as much as He cares about how Christ's life and Christ's message can save his family. Tim sees his family's biggest problem is not political, but spiritual. He believes their only hope is Christ, not a politician or a certain policy.

Whereas his sister and her husband and to some extent his Dad and his niece and nephew want to fight and win *political* battles, Tim and his Mom want to fight and win *spiritual* battles. But the question that penetrates Tim's mind when he goes to this dinner is this: *how?* How does he do it? How is it that he can move the conversation, direct, mold, and shape it such that they do not end up debating, arguing, and wrangling over politics instead of discussing *someone* far more important and urgent: Jesus. Creator, Savior, and Lord? Well, Tim arrives, comes into the house and greets his parents, and then sits down in his favorite spot, in the corner, back up against the wall by the cabinet where Mom keeps her precious chinaware. He sits and says a silent prayer underneath his breath, "Help me, Lord. Give me Your grace, Your peace, and Your boldness to speak truth and to do it in sincere *love*. Amen."

Here is a question for you, dear listener. Is Tim alone in feeling this way? Is Tim's experience unique? I doubt it. And I know I certainly can relate to him. I believe there will be many of you listening to me who can relate to Tim and his Mom. You are a Christian. And you want other people you love, especially family members, to also be disciples of the Lord. You want this more than, or almost more than, you want anything else in life. You regularly ask God to redeem your loved ones from the immoral and anti-Christ culture in which we all live.

And you also are particularly burdened for children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and young people in your family, school and church, synagogue, maybe mosque or temple, and neighborhood. You are *very* disturbed by the rapid moral decline of the nation and the specific attack this brings on our children.

But in this radically polarized culture in which we live and in which we meet others for meals and drinks, it is not easy to know *how* to talk with others about our faith in Christ by demonstrating that conversation around Him (the most important person in our lives) is more important to us than anything else we could possibly talk about. We find that we have lost the ground in dialogue around the person of Christ, and we do not know how to get it back. Instead it seems that all anyone wants to talk about is whatever prevailing issues, in society, in the media are popular to kick around that week.

Sometimes Tim gets sucked right into this. Someone at the table will be pounding away on a hot topic and offering their views – the exact opposite of his – and at first he tries to avoid taking the bait and firing off his opinion. He bites his tongue. But then the other person shows combativeness, becoming very militant in their position, accusing people who do not agree with them of this and that. He feels his blood pressure rising. Uh oh! He is about to have a visceral reaction to what is being said. Remember, Tim has not come there to do this, but before he realizes it, he is doing what he did not want to do. Having been put on the defensive, he enters this electrified conversation, raising his voice and pounding slightly on the table to say how “ridiculous” is their way of thinking and acting. He vehemently disagrees with their perspective.

Here are a couple of observations about what Tim has done. First, it is important to note that he is right (according to his Christian worldview anyway) on the subject at hand. He is speaking *truth* out of the courage of his convictions. But second, even though he is right, by thrusting himself into the debate with such emotion, fervor, and passion now what he has done is to lose the plot of the gospel he has come to tell and to demonstrate. By reacting and engaging the way he did, he looks around the table and realizes that now nobody wants to hear what he has to say about Jesus because they have tuned him out, *perceiving* that he too cares most deeply about...politics and policies. He is no different than they are! Tim is just on the other *side* of the issue.

Some of you Christians must be saying to me about now, “Well, we have to speak the *truth*! We have to fight back in this country. We cannot let the Left and the Liberals get their way. People have to know where we stand. We’ve tried being gracious and look where that got us. Our country is unrecognizable! They’re targeting our children and grandchildren. Good for you Tim for taking a stand. It’s a war out there and sometimes that war needs to be fought at the dinner table!”

Let me just say that I, Mark, hear you. And I know Tim well enough to know that he hears you loud and clear. Nevertheless, he is convicted, like many of us in similar circumstances are. Because he is the Christian, because he is the associate of Jesus, he is the one with the God given responsibility to act loving, gracious, merciful, forgiving, and patient. Tim is the one at the table with the expectation that he will obey the commands of Christ. He has the life of Christ to model; to put on display. His relatives do not. The *way* of Jesus in expressing himself is something he needs to learn to do. Yes, *even* in this current environment of rampant immorality and evil in which we live. *Especially* now. No wonder he feels cautious and anxious entering his parent’s house for these events.

Tim wants to be part of the reason his loved ones will believe in Christ, not the reason, or even part of the reason, they will not. And here again, I believe many of you agree with him and with me. So, what can we do about this? How can we, in the words of the Apostle Paul, be the **“fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing”**? (2 Corinthians 2.15.) The fragrance or the aroma of Christ to God, how can we smell like Jesus to others? Yes! This means telling people the truth. Jesus did that. But He was (He is) a truth teller in a specific *way*.

What I would like to do in the days ahead is to share with you some of what I am learning about how to handle the situation Tim and myself and others find ourselves in. I hope you will join me so we can learn together. I do not have all the answers, so I would like to hear from you as well along the way. Let’s see if, with one another and in the presence of God, we can be of encouragement to Tim and those of us like him. Join us again next time because God Is.

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