

Christian Doormat

Jack Elder

Recorded on September 3, 2022

We find ourselves in an age of ever-changing words. There's a new term, there's a new word that seems to come out every other week and you have to look it up to figure out what people are talking about. A lot of this comes from our political landscape that we find ourselves in right now. The politicians use words that control the narrative; mainly because they are trying to cover up what they're really doing. They want to achieve their agenda so they'll use just about any kind of strategy they can and inventing new words is one of those. They create a fog so you can't tell what they're doing. Then they'll turn around and pass that off as transparency.

If anybody is remotely awake, we can see that politically, everything is blatantly corrupt. It seems like hypocrisy has been elevated to an art form, that's how bad it's getting. We'll stay apolitical, we don't like to do that here at the pulpit. The point I'm trying to make in the introduction to my sermon is that words have meaning.

Looking back, you remember how we used to ascribe categories for differences in people? Do you remember doing that? We used to use the term stereotyping and that's defined as one that is regarded as conforming to a set image or type. That was a pretty common term; we used to see that a lot but not so much anymore. Now there's most likely going to be some kind of a politically correct version of stereotype. I had looked this up but there are dictionaries on politically correct words to use. There are dictionaries—I never knew that.

Just a short list of some of the things you'll find there, if you're short (this is an old one) or not too tall, like me, you're "vertically challenged". You're not short, you're not a runt, you're vertically challenged. Homeless people—the politically correct style book recommends that the people who are homeless people are referred to as "people without housing" or "people without homes". It's very disparaging to say that they are derelicts or vagrants—you can't do that anymore. If you're really sensitive, you will refer to homeless people as "outdoor urban dwellers". You didn't know that did you? If you are insane, you're "reality challenged". There's a whole list of that stuff if you like to google.

Back to this idea of categorically slotting people. There is a more archaic term that we used years ago, and this is going way back, we would actually use a process that would attempt to classify people called "pigeon-holing". Do you remember that one? I actually looked that up it's so old. It's such an archaic term that I looked it up so I could refresh my own memory, although I knew what that meant. Here is what I came up with:

The consensus among ethnologists is that this usually comes from the original pigeon-hole being extended metaphorically with the meaning of the category, the person or thing is being assigned to is as narrow and confined as the literal pigeon-hole.

One thing I ran across when looking up that particular term, is that during the Middle Ages they would raise pigeons for food. I never knew that. Getting to the point, if you're a Christian, due to the influences of the world, you fit a certain image. You fall into a category of people's concept of what a Christian looks like. You are automatically stereotyped whether you like it or not, or whether you agree or not. One of those influences of course is Hollywood. Hollywood portrays a Christian character in a certain image, usually a preacher type, very stern, stoical, looking down his nose at the rest of the world as a bunch of heathens. Also, typically—and this always struck me as kind of funny—they are portrayed in movies as having an aura of wisdom. Understanding anything about God or that is spiritual is a mystery, so only certain people can do that. It comes across in some of the portrayal that they use. Of course, that image comes right out of central casting in Hollywood called "type casting".

Getting back to what we're going to talk about. The typical image of Christians which is portrayed is that Christians are a kind of like a doormat.

That's the title of the sermon.

Christian Doormat

Of course, everybody knows that. Why do I even use that term? I just want to explain for the literalists among us that this does not mean a rubber or jute mat that you throw in front of your entry door—it doesn't mean that. It is something with Christian symbols on it, a scripture or a cross or fish. I thought, I'll look on Amazon, and there's a ton of them on there. If you want to do that; if you want a Christian type, literally, to stick in front of your door there they are. Why use that term Christian doormat?

About 99% of people out there, including us, before we knew anything—I'll certainly admit to my ignorance—we had a preconceived notion of what a Christian should look like and how they should act. We have this stereotypical idea, if I can use that term. We probably think of scriptures that say someone is a Christian if they are someone who turns the other cheek, who walks the extra mile, gives you the cloak off their back, etc. If I asked you to make up a list of adjectives that describe a Christian you would come up with something like I did. A few bullets—the typical image that we have—is someone who is kind and considerate, courteous and never rude, never says "boo" to anyone, always nice to everyone, no matter the situation; just nice all the time. In fact, they exude an aura of niceness. One time I even heard that someone in the church had said, "Nice people are almost Christian already." There is probably a little more to it. But actually, we should be those things.

We probably also think that we are supposed to reflect Christ in our lives. That's true in a larger sense. The Protestants have a saying, W.W.J.D.—Walk with Jesus Daily. I don't know if you have heard that before. Is that an accurate picture? Is that a complete picture of what a Christian is. For the time that I have, I would like to submit that there's more to being a Christian than never offending anyone. In fact, there's a lot more to it. I

would like to further submit that if you or I claim to be a Christian, we are going to offend people whether we want to or not. Especially today, you can't avoid it. I don't know if you've noticed or not, but it's not exactly a pro-Christian society that we live in. There's kind of a war against Christianity. I've even heard of cases where these reality talk shows interview people and I remember one case years ago. I can't remember the family's name but they came on and expressed their Christian values and people wrote and called into the company saying that they wanted that taken off the air. They didn't want to hear that a family would have Christian values.

I'll go a little further and make a statement that if you've never offended anyone with your religion, maybe your light is under a bushel. Or maybe you are recluse, living somewhere else. I wanted you to know what I was talking about and let everybody know the definition of a doormat. Two definitions are relevant for what we're talking about. A doormat is:

Number one, a mat placed in the doorway on which people wipe the grime off their shoes before people come into the house.

Number two—and this is the one we are interested in and the one we are referring to—a doormat is a submissive person who allows others to dominate them; a typical docile, self-deprecating Christian.

That is generally the image that the world has. When you really look at our lives, when you walk in our shoes—and my wife and I were talking this morning, next year we are going to be in our half century in the church and we've learned some of the things we're going to talk about—sometimes a Christian does need to take a stand and not be that proverbial doormat. In fact, to actually be assertive. Please notice I said assertive, not aggressive. We've known people in and out of the church who are actually aggressive. They go around with a chip on their shoulder all the time. A lot of people would argue there is a fine line between being totally passive to being too aggressive. Somewhere there in the middle there's a bouncer.

I looked up the word *assertiveness* in the dictionary and it talked about "a disposition characterized by boldness and confidence." Actually, how we should be; we should be confident in the things we believe and be bold in expressing those. We'll see a little bit about that later in scripture. The whole concept of being assertive encompasses boldness and confidence where aggressiveness implies an element of hostility. Someone who has a disposition to dominate other people with total disregard for the other person. That's the picture of a bully. Sometimes when we talk about assertiveness there can be an initial negative reaction; people say they can't be that way. There are people in the church who, I think, at least in our experience, are naturally assertive. They boldly stand up for what they believe in or they may be strongly opinionated. We've known those types; they are rare types actually. In the past maybe you were like that. Again, in our experience, most of us are a little introverted but we have seen some extroverted folks who were very outspoken. Years ago, in the church they were branded as "free thinkers" and if they did push their opinions they were just politely brushed

aside. A lot of times those folks would challenge the ministry; I've known a few who would do that. If they didn't make too loud a noise, they were just kind of a "no, never mind". They would submit papers and whoever they interviewed with would be polite to them, say goodbye and drop their paper in the round file.

A learned behavior as Christians is to wish everybody a nice day, be nice and smile. Christ did say something in the Sermon on the Mount about one aspect of our nature that we should have as God's people—as Christians, in Matthew 5:5, New King James.

Matthew 5:5 *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.* (NKJV)

The New American Standard says the *gentle*. In the Greek that word means a "gentle disposition", a picture of meekness. It goes on to say that those with that type of character will inherit the earth. So, we have this picture of a Christian being a very religious, even a piously nice person. Because I always look at the different translations, as I have mentioned a lot of times when I speak I like the Amplified Bible and here is Matthew 5:5 from the Amplified. We even see this common image in some translations and here is a class example. As you know the Amplified will give the verse and then parenthetically amplify what it's trying to say or what they think their interpretation of what it says.

Matthew 5:5 *Blessed (happy, blithe, joyous, spiritually prosperous with life joy and satisfaction in God's favor in salvation regardless of their outward conditions) are meek (their mild, patient, long-suffering), for they shall inherit the earth.* (AMP)

Think there's any influence there? They took nine words in that verse and made thirty-five to express it. No doubt in my mind they have this particular image of a Christian in their minds. Let's be turning to Matthew 11. Obviously, we know from scripture we can tell that we should be like Christ and we have the scriptural record that tells us what He was like and how He lived. In Matthew 11:28-30 from the New Living Translation.

Matthew 11:28 *Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest
29) Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* (NLT)

The implication is that we are to be like that.

30) *For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.*" (NLT)

Over in chapter 21 it even speaks more of Christ's nature—how He was. For the most part we want to imitate that. This is speaking to Christ's humility. This is from the New King James.

Matthew 21:1 *Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,
2) saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me.
3) And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them, 'and immediately he will send them."
4) All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet [referring to Zechariah 9:9], saying:
5) Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'"* (NKJV)

He says those who are meek are blessed. He says He is the king who comes in meekness, gentleness, lowliness, riding on a donkey and the symbolism there is obvious. Lowly and humble, riding on a donkey—emphatically that is saying it's just the opposite of coming on a war horse which would be a symbol of violence and power—He didn't come that way. The point is He is emphasizing His meek nature. Dropping down farther in Matthew 21, New King James, we see a different side of Christ.

Matthew 21:12 *Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.
13) And He said to them, "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, 'but you have made it a den of thieves.'"* (NKJV)

He's quoting Isaiah 56 and Jeremiah 7. Those scriptures that Gordon was talking about in the sermonette, the temple needs to be pure—that represents God's Presence and they were desecrating the temple. So, on the one hand He emphasizes a gentle nature and talks about how blessed we are if we exhibit similar behavior, yet He acts here in a way that we might think is the antithesis of meekness and gentleness. He rather violently upsets these tables and says nasty things to these folks even though they deserved what He did to them. Further in Matthew 23, over a couple chapters, He is excoriating the Pharisees, the Scribes and all of them. To *excoriate* something is "to skin" it? He's verbally skinning them for their behavior, for what they are doing; He takes their skin off. The Scribes and Pharisees, He calls them He sees them.

Matthew 23:23 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin [he's speaking to the meanness and their application of the minutia that they laid on people], and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.
24) Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!
25) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.* (NKJV)

Why does that sound like modern politics?

26) *Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.*

27) *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.*

28) *Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

29) *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,*

30) *and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'*

31) *"Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.*

32) *Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt.*

33) *Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? (NKJV)*

He wasn't being nice.

34) *Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city ... (NKJV)*

You chase them.

35) *that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.*

36) *Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.*

37) *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (NKJV)*

A picture of His gentler nature, but still.

38) *See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!"' (NKJV)*

There's no need for interpretation there. The way that is written, the way the record is for us, it's almost like a diatribe that He unleashes on them. He calls them something less than *gentle* or *meeek* in His rebuke. No nice flattery there at all. I know we all understand that Christ's righteous indignation in these cases is totally justified. He was always in control. You can note that in scripture, you can see throughout the scriptures that we have He never rendered evil for evil even though He could have. In another place He asked His Father to send a legion of angels, in His defense when He was

being tried just before His crucifixion. He never lost it. We would say He always kept His cool. Paul mentioned a little bit about that kind of control in Galatians 5 and again I'm using the New King James.

Galatians 5:22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness ...* (NKJV)

Those are characteristics. But He adds something.

23) *gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.* (NKJV)

The Amplified, for *self-control*, uses *self-restraint*; in other words, restrain our human nature in the same context as *gentleness*. How does self-control enter into the equation of what we're talking about? When you think about it, if we justifiably assert ourselves in some situations but throw in some anger, it quickly escalates, doesn't it? It turns into retaliation and even vengeance. That's not self-control whenever it goes that far. Raise your hand if you've never lost it or blown up. We've all been there, haven't we? That's our carnal nature. God expects us to control it even when we do assert ourselves. I'll mention some things as we go along here. We still need to keep some control; that's what God expects from us. In Galatians 6 Paul talks about using a spirit of gentleness, of meekness when helping someone to overcome with the burden of sin.

Galatians 6:1 *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness [not self-righteousness nor anger], considering yourself lest you also be tempted.* (NKJV)

Clearly, the point is we see is that *meekness* and *gentleness* are a requirement for a Christian, but the application is sometimes where we have a misunderstanding. In Acts 4, we see how Jesus Christ's apostles applied their understanding of what this meant regarding the things that befell them. In these situations that they found themselves in. Another scripture, just as a reference, Ecclesiastes 3:7 says *there is a time to tear and a time to sew* [but the latter part says there is] a time *to keep silent or a time to speak or speak up* [or you could say] *stand up*. There's a time for all of those things. My point is, there is a time to be meek and a time to be assertive; to stand up for what is right. They did in their circumstances; it tells us that in Acts 4:18. We know the story—the context—Peter and John were preaching about Jesus performing miracles in His name and of course this created a disturbance amongst religious leaders. It kind of rattled their collective, authoritative cages. They called into account over it.

Acts 4:18 *So they [the Sanhedrin] called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.* (NKJV)

They gave them an order, "Don't do it, we are the authority, don't do it." The rulers of the Sanhedrin are seventy-one members if I remember correctly. With the high priest presiding and of course they had elders too. The elders were Jewish aristocracy, predominantly the Sadducees. The Scribes are mostly the Pharisees, whose function

was to interpret the law. Actually, they were all the politicians of that day. It's interesting because I get a picture here, the council convened in a semi-circle and they had the apostles sitting in the middle and they interrogated them with a barrage of questions. Note the power seating. The power seating was designed around their pecking order. I spent twenty plus years in a corporation and I've been to 1000 meetings and I've seen pretty similar things, time and time again. The point is, look at the huge intimidation factor against these—look at the pressure on Peter and John. They were under the gun quite literally, from just about every angle. These were the religious leaders of the day and you would not normally defy them; you just wouldn't do that. You were expected to be "a good little doormat".

19) But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.

20) For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (NKJV)

Not possible for them; they couldn't do anything else.

21) So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people [they had some pressure on them too from the outside], since they all glorified God for what had been done. (NKJV)

What He had done is in verse 22.

22) For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed. (NKJV)

That's what this whole incident was about in the first place, as the context shows. Over in Acts 5, they continued doing what they were doing. The leaders called them to task again, in fact they threw them into jail this time, put them in prison. We know the whole story; an angel took care of that—God sent an angel to take care of that. In Acts 5:28, again using the Amplified Version.

Acts 5:28 ... saying, *"We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this Man's blood on us [by accusing us as His murderers].*

29) Then Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than men [we have no other choice]. (AMP)

They had no options—none. Peter didn't just say meekly,

"You're the authority, clearly God wants me to follow your instructions."

That would have been a nice, docile, doormat type person. No, they stood up for what was right. They believed preaching the truth was what they had been instructed to do by Christ. That was what was right; they stood up for what was right. Peter didn't take the cowards way out as some would say. *"I'm just doing my job; I had better listen and*

behave myself.” He didn’t do that at all. He didn’t take the way out where he said, *“I’ll just keep quiet. If I go against these religious authorities, I might get beaten or killed.”* Which they tried to do anyway. In the context of just these scriptures here we could define assertiveness as standing up for what is right. Sometimes you have to do that. So how do you know what’s right? Here’s a clue—God is always right. Pretty simple; God is always right.

Where we get into trouble is whenever we try to interpret God’s instruction to mean something it doesn’t. In which case we usually suffer the consequences. Another point about *assertiveness* is that not only does it mean “standing up for what is wrong”, but it also means “standing up to whoever is wrong”. There are lots of examples we could draw on there; we could look at a whole bunch of church history, but if we did that we would be off on a great big tangent that would go on and on.

The opposite of assertiveness is aggressiveness which more often reflects a frame of mind that seeks to bully others, to dominate them, to abuse others in order to get one’s way, which is what the council was doing to Peter and John. The assertive person by definition—the definition we’re using here—is standing up for what is right, standing up to whatever or whoever is wrong. Sometimes we just have to be assertive to do that.

I can think of a lot of examples but one that popped into my mind, what happened to us years ago, we had a situation that most people who have been parents—just about everybody in here has been one—and this was back in the days when our kids, in this particular case, it was our son who was in High School. We had to face this many, many times. There was a huge intimidation factor there too. Too often we would get bamboozled by what the school or administrators would try to tell us; they would try to intimidate us. So just like Paul did, (you can find the account in Acts 22 later in the chapter where he invoked his right as a Roman citizen) we could do the same thing as a citizen. With this incident with my son, we wanted to take off school for the Feast. He had just gone from Middle School to High School and I believe it was his teacher who told him he couldn’t take any time off. She said *“You can’t do that; you’ll fall so far behind that I’ll just fail you.”* I did a little research and met with the assistant principal at the time and was promptly told that they had a zero-tolerance policy. In other words, that included absenteeism being like any other infraction, and it was zero tolerance. The student would get suspended, penalized—everything. I kind of chuckled to myself because at the time—this was thirty plus years ago—this same High School had a smoking area set aside for the kids who smoked. Anyway, I looked this up—I didn’t look it up recently but it’s probably similar because it has to do with discrimination laws—twenty-two states have this particular law on the books and Washington is one of them and I’ll quote from that law.

The school district can excuse a child for the purpose of observing religious observance, including traveling for that purpose.

No “ifs”, ands or “buts”, it’s a legal requirement.

A student whose absence is excused, may not be penalized for that absence.

They cannot do that because it's against the state law.

A student so excused shall be allowed a reasonable time to make up school work on those days missed.

The school districts don't tell you that; what they try to say is, we have our regulations, we have our policies and if your child violates those, they are going to pay the price. In that particular case we simply stood our ground. I'm not saying it was a good example, it was just necessary at the time. It was like saying, "Sorry you have your policy but that doesn't triumph state law." Even though you may not say that directly, in a sense you are telling them that they are not going to bully you or your family in this particular circumstance, telling them that you are going to take our child out of school, that you observe your religion as a family—all of us go.

What about kids in college? Same thing.

An institution shall allow [not maybe, not should] a student whose absence is in observance of religious holy day to take an exam or complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence if the student has let the instructor know within two weeks of the first day of the semester and notification is in writing...

And we always did that. At the beginning of the first of the school year, we knew this was going to come up so we tried to take care of all of this. Going on:

A student who is excused may not be penalized for the absence.

They can't get away with that. This has to do with anti-discrimination laws. The point is, you have those rights and you can invoke those rights as a citizen; you can use that in your defense. Paul left us an example because he did that. Same thing with an employer. I spent twenty years working construction and employers usually don't like to be inconvenienced by you taking off for the Feast or not working Saturdays and all that. I worked for a contractor one time—I was a union craftsman and was dispatched for various contractors—and worked for a year for a contractor. It wasn't General Electric but a person doing work for General Electric at Grand Coulee Dam and they worked seven days a week. That means I wasn't there fifty-two Saturdays in that year that I worked there. Was that an issue all the time? No, once I made my position known, I had a really good superintendent and it wasn't really an issue. Those are civil rights laws and employers are required to make accommodations. There are very few caveats that tell them if they have other choices. I'm not saying all employers are bad, most of them are very accommodating. In my experience it has always been dependent on what kind of employee you are. If they want to get rid of you in the first place, they find a way to do that and might use that.

Back in those days when I actually worked for a living [I've been retired for sixteen years] they weren't all that sensitive. They are more so today. People are aware of a lot more today and a lot of that has to do with lawsuits. In every area of our lives there are going to be people who intimidate you and try to take advantage of you and manipulate you—there just is. Like the adage says: "If it happens to us once, shame on them but if it happens to us twice, shame on us." In other words, if we don't stand up for ourselves, "shame on us".

Unfortunately, this kind of behavior also happens in the church. Some have taken advantage of brethren. In some cases, they've been abusive to the point they are treating other brethren like *doormats*. Years ago, I was in this local area and the "moving deacon", I had to get them help to move. If somebody was moving—I'm not kidding you, back in the '60's, '70's and 80's there were a lot of people moving in and out of here. We had a congregation locally that I think peaked at about 160 or more. Counting Yakima and Quincy, there were a lot of people there. They would all say to me—"Jack, you're the deacon, you get a crew together". If they did that today you know what I would say? I would say, "OK I'll go down to the nursing home and if I find anybody with a pulse, we'll come help you move." We couldn't do it, we're just too old now. But getting back to the story, we had a couple who were in and out of here, maybe four times, could be more. They would move out, move back in, maybe move locally, move out, move back in and it was getting abusive. Finally, the minister had to come in and confront them and get assertive with them and tell them this is stopping. We're not going to do this anymore. In the first place they were killing me. What happened was—the back story—these folks were moving to stay ahead of the bill collectors. Worst Christian ethics in that. Of course, the minister was criticized for doing that; he wasn't tolerant enough.

As Christians we have a responsibility in some cases to not be enablers of bad behavior; to be assertive. If you think about it, if we are unwilling to confront someone because we worry about hurting their feelings, thinking we might offend them in some way we allow that destructive behavior to continue. We should be letting the person know that their behavior is not acceptable and they can't do that. You can't just say, "*I want to be a nice person, I never want to rock the boat no matter what, let someone else take care of it.*" That's usually the way it goes. If that is allowed to continue it starts affecting others and in a lot of cases it's not just only to the minister, it's the individual. If you know these things are going on, we have a responsibility to at least make an effort and stand up.

Standing up assertively does requires courage and wisdom. It is so much easier to say nothing or do nothing and typically what happens in situations like that? People do say a lot to others behind someone's back when they really should be talking to the person they have an issue with; it's a lot easier though to avoid that confrontation. Nobody really likes confrontation, although some people do. Most people don't like that. That requires some courage and some wisdom. If we don't do that, that doesn't show courage or wisdom, that allows things to continue which should be stopped.

We should go to the person; we have scriptures that tell us that. Look at James 4 and I'm going to use the Amplified Version again.

James 4:11 *Believers, do not speak against or slander one another. He who speaks [self-righteously] against a brother or judges his brother [hypocritically], speaks against the Law and judges the Law. If you judge the Law, you are not a doer of the Law but a judge of it. (AMP)*

In other words, you are forgetting that the law applies to you too.

12) There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy [the one God who has the absolute power of life and death]; but who are you to [hypocritically or self-righteously] pass judgment on your neighbor? (AMP)

There are some pretty timeless principles regarding human nature and what it is telling us is that we should be speaking to people instead of speaking about them. If you look at the whole context of James—I've always liked the book of James—he's talking about people problems within the church. He is talking about wars and fighting going on inside the church and among the brethren. That sounds kind of familiar. The point is, if we take a personal grievance with others, it's not what we should be doing among ourselves. I say again, *the right kind of assertiveness requires wisdom and courage*. Let's go to Revelation 21 and take note of a word here. Revelation 21, as you know talks about those who will be cast into a lake of fire presumably for things they are unwilling to repent of or change in their lives. There's an element in the list here that is relevant to what we're talking about.

Revelation 21:8 *But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers ... (NKJV)*

I won't read the rest of the list but for our purposes let's take a quick look at that word *cowardly*. You won't find that in the Greek but most translations use that word. It's one of the words in the Greek used for *fearful*. Here it means "timid", it means "implying timidity that dreads something". What others think, it's a "faithless kind of fear". The English definition of *timid* is, "easily frightened, lacking self-confidence". Remember that *assertive* definition also includes "boldness and confidence". The point is assertiveness requires a certain amount of courage. To be clear, I'm not talking about an "in your face" kind of assertiveness. I've said in the past, a situation may not call for niceness but you do have remain civil. One of the reasons I believe there are so many bullies in schools, workplaces and churches is because most people don't dare stand up to them. It's easier to just let it go. Sometimes it goes like this, "I did try it once, it didn't seem to work. In fact, the person yelled at me." Or the person tried to make you feel guilty or the person blamed you for the problem. It wasn't them; they were the victim. Or they threatened you and called you names. So, I gave up—I tried, didn't work, no use trying so I gave up, I quit. Let someone else do it, throw it in the minister's lap, throw it on his plate. That, of course is not showing courage or wisdom. That's not saying in certain situations that you shouldn't allow space, or "cooling off" space if things get heated up

enough between brethren—between us and one of the other brethren. I think we give up too quickly and too easily.

Over in Proverbs 15—we have this in scripture—it's a behavior thing. It's an element of the behavior and of being assertive. Proverbs 15 talks about giving a soft answer—there's a time to do that. We also need to know how to respond appropriately under various circumstances.

Proverbs 15:1 *A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.* (NKJV)

In other words we don't go around looking for trouble; we want to be *wise as serpents and harmless as doves*, as Christ told us to be. Also in Proverbs 26:4 and 5.

Proverbs 26:4 *Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him.*

5) *Answer a fool according to his folly, Lest he be wise in his own eyes.* (NKJV)

We've heard this many times, they appear to contradict each other. What this is teaching us in principle is you have to use wisdom and evaluate every situation. Nobody likes confrontation, we just don't; we avoid it if we can. I think we've learned this somewhat through the years. In order to develop that courage and wisdom, you have to step out and gain that experience. You have to apply these things, even when we don't want to, even when we are afraid and don't want to. I always like the John Wayne saying, "*Even if you are afraid saddle up anyway*". Obviously, God gives us all the time and space to grow. In that we can learn the best response under any given circumstance. We know too that God gives us latitude in regard to individual personalities. We're not all the same, we're not cookie cutter Christians or cookie cutter doormats in this case. We're all different and God knows that, but He does expect us to operate within the boundaries of these principles that He gives us and we can.

We have another example, a very familiar set of scriptures that we have heard many times, I'll approach them from a slightly different angle in Matthew 18. It tells us how to respond in the most effective way if we have a problem with someone. Notice that He is teaching that we need a certain amount of assertiveness in dealing with this kind of a problem. There has to be that element there. How to be assertive in a Christian way. We usually start in verse 15 but the context really is back in verse 8 so we'll start in verse 8.

Matthew 18:8 *If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.*

9) *And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.* (NKJV)

We know it's not literal, it's not telling us to mutilate ourselves. But what it is telling us, if you see the message and what is being said here, it's telling us to be assertive with ourselves. Even taken metaphorically, it requires a certain amount of self-assertiveness to be willing to cut off an arm or pluck out an eye. You have to look at yourself. The context is warning us about offenses, about giving them but also instructions if we are on the receiving end of that. Now let's go down to verse 15.

15) Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. (NKJV)

If he has done you wrong, maybe taken advantage of you. I like this from the Amplified again.

*15) If your brother wrongs you [King James says *trespasses against you*—so you have all those terms, I talked about not long ago] *go and show him his faults between you and him privately. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. (AMP)**

It's telling us to be assertive to take the matter up strictly between yourselves—contain it, don't allow it to spread. If you go behind somebody's back and complain about what they have done to you or how they are treating other people, you're not applying it correctly. It takes some courage to do that, to be assertive and stand up for what's right. In reality, in some cases, it not only benefits you, it benefits the person you are standing up to. This is because nobody else is involved at this point and could also be because nobody has dared ever stand up to this person before. Maybe standing up and confronting someone—it's hard, it's not easy to do that—they might start to think and consider themselves and what they're doing. They might see themselves for the first time because nobody else has ever stood up to them; nobody else has ever told them what a pain they and their behaviors are to everybody. Nobody has ever dared called them out. If we follow these principles, that's a right kind of assertiveness and it produces a win for everyone involved. That last part of verse 15 says if he listens to you, you have won back your brother.

I mentioned several times that it takes courage and wisdom to stand up and be assertive when it is called for. But as far as I can tell, any kind of courage and the wisdom we develop is developed by doing what we know we ought to do in spite of the fear we feel. In fact, real courage, if you don't feel some apprehension, are you truly being courageous, because there is an element of fear. There has to be a certain fear there. Let's look at our example as a small group—as a church. You could even say we are insignificant when you compare to the larger churches, the greater church of God that we call it. When it came to the God of the Old Testament, didn't we approach that whole thing with a certain amount of trepidation in light of our traditional, long-held understanding? We didn't take that lightly. Even though at the time, we never dreamt it would create a fire storm of emotions like it did. Some of them are still there. It took some time for all of us. We were sorting through scriptures and no one I knew of was in a rush to change doctrine—we just weren't. But as we began to accumulate a mountain

of evidence that Yehovah was the active, Individual in the Godhead, Who is active in the Old Testament. Christ was there but He became the Messiah later. We could have taken another approach; we could have said, we see the truth but we know it will upset and offend people so maybe we just ignore it and it will go away. Besides, haven't the church authorities looked at it and rejected it? Mainly because it flies in the face of "pride bound tradition". That might sound familiar too. Kind of the same thing the apostles ran into with Peter and John. We might even lose members—we can't have that.

When you do stand up for what is right, in this case we stood up for undeniable truth, people will accuse you of looking down at everybody else because they don't see it the way we do. That's not true—that's just not true. I think all of us are spiritually mature enough to realize that God has the responsibility of leading people to truth, not us. We're going to say it because we can't do anything else. We're in the same position that the apostles were; we cannot do anything but speak the truth—we can't. The truth is always going to be the truth; it always has been, it always will be. When God chooses to bring people through that, they will get it and understand it.

Paul leaves us an example and this is the final scripture, over in Ephesians 6. He is closing his letter to the Ephesian brethren and you can almost detect a sadness in the words here; that these may be the last words that he ever speaks to them. To me I kind of see that in the words.

Ephesians 6:10 *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*

11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (NKJV)

Stance is an interesting word in the Greek. Metaphorically it means "to stand firm"; that's what Paul is admonishing these folks about.

12) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (NKJV)

He's saying that you're going to be in a spiritual battle the rest of your life. It's always incoming.

13) Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (NKJV)

Same word again.

14) Stand [the New Living says stand your ground] therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness ... (NKJV)

Remember Paul was in prison when he was writing this. Things were not looking up for him at this point at all. A common interpretation of this is that he is contracting a metaphor here of the armor. He was surrounded by Roman military but Paul knew there was a much greater power. To me it's interesting, I can't really get into Paul's thinking process, but his reference to *girdle* is interesting too. The soldiers put on a wide belt to cinch up their clothes and keep them tight so they can fight. What he is saying about the girdle is that he wraps himself up in that truth, (a "girdle of truth") that God has given him. There's a lesson there for us. The exact opposite is girding himself up with an idea of just going along, don't rock the boat, I think I'll take it easy and not risk offending anyone. I'll just stick with tradition until this all blows over—business as usual. He didn't do that. He wrapped himself up figuratively with truth to fight, to stand up for the truth. That's what he did; he spent his whole life doing that, once God called him.

*15) and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
16) above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.
17) And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; (NKJV)*

Dropping to verse 19 which is interesting too.

19) and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel ... (NKJV)

In other words, to stand up for the truth and to preach the truth.

20) for which I am an ambassador in chains [he doesn't have any other choice, no other options]; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. (NKJV)

His whole life was dedicated them; he lived and died for the whole thing. It's the same situation that Peter and John were in. Remember they said in Acts 4:20:

"for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

It's just not possible to do or say anything else. It would have been a whole lot easier for these guys and for us too, given our situation these days, to be a proverbial doormat and we can do that if we choose to do so. For the most part, we all strive as God's people to live quiet, peaceful lives, but there are times when we just need to stand up for ourselves or to others and be assertive in a right sense. I've tried to cover a few biblical principles that clearly show that. It's not wrong to do that. Nowhere in scripture does it say that Christians have to be "*a doormat*" in the bad sense of that metaphor. It doesn't say that anywhere; it doesn't even imply that. We don't have to be nice to everyone but we do have to apply right biblical principles and respond appropriately and I hope we have seen a brief glimpse of that today.