

# Memorandum

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To: Christian Leaders

From: Cathy Mickels

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Subject: **Mark Driscoll: Is he qualified to lead?**

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## Summary and Introduction

This memo is written to Christian leaders detailing my concerns regarding the ministry of Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle. His church has grown to 6,000 members in 11 years and is also described as one of the fastest growing, innovative churches in America.

Because this ministry is characterized by so many examples of the trivialization of Scripture, crudeness, foolish talk and vulgarity it will be a challenge to keep my correspondence as brief as possible.

Research leads me to concur with Pastor John MacArthur, who has also said, "I have a great concern about him. [Mark Driscoll.]"

In fact, in a radio interview with Todd Friel on the April 7, 2008, edition of Way of the Master, referring to Mark Driscoll's book, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev*, Pastor MacArthur said, "...there are statements in that book that are so sexually explicit and unnecessary and purely gratuitous humor at the basest kind of level; I saw a video from a service in the church in January in which comments were made from his pulpit, which were then put.... on the website, which again, were sexually explicit and gratuitous and unnecessary...in which he referred to a certain sin and actually twisted out-of-context a Bible verse as a kind of way to mock that sin. You know ....there was a time when we worried about the church adjusting itself to accommodate the peoples' social expectations, and then their psychological expectations, and now the latest wave of this let's identify with them at their sensual level. And I think that baser approach - that's something I've never heard of in my life -- I've never, ever, in the name of ministry heard anyone who would speak at that level of explicit language with regard to things sexual...**I just think there is a dignity, there's a maturity, there's a holiness, a virtue, a fear of God that belongs with the pastorate, ...there's a refinement that belongs in the ministry. The Bible talks about that ; being 'sober-minded' - the pursuit of**

**godliness....Speech that comes out of your mouth, no filthy communication, only that which ministers grace to the hearer ....you can't put one thought in their mind and then try to transition them to something holy...it's a new kind of thing that I never, ever, imagined would happen..."**

Also see John MacArthur article at <http://www.sfpulpit.com/2006/12/11/grunge-christianity/> .

These serious comments made by respected pastor John MacArthur should cause those who treasure the inspired Word of God to question why evangelical leaders are supporting this controversial, very edgy Seattle ministry. Furthermore, since Mark Driscoll has proven time and time again that he handles God's Word carelessly, why is Mark Driscoll a highlighted speaker at The Gospel Coalition's 2009 National Convention? It is all the more disturbing knowing Driscoll will be speaking on "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth." Why are evangelical leaders, such as John Piper, willing to overlook his crudity and excuse the fact that at the expense of God's Word, Mark Driscoll distorts and twists Scripture as if it were material for a stand-up comedian?

<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about>

Oddly enough, it was a stand-up comedian, foul-mouthed Chris Rock, whom Mark Driscoll credits with teaching him how to preach. Mark claims this comedian was "a better study in homiletics than most classes on the subject." (*Confessions of a Reformed Rev*, pg. 70). Therefore, would he think others should also follow his example, which will require them to fill their mind with curse words and smut in order to learn how to effectively deliver a good sermon?

Admittedly, Mark Driscoll states he is reformed in his thinking, and he can deliver a sound sermon if he wants to. But, that does not negate his reckless, irreverent treatment of God's Word, and the crude language that proceeds out of his mouth. This only makes his ministry more dangerous. If an enemy of the faith had used the same comedy to mock and pervert the Word of God, we would see this attack for what it is. Moreover, throughout the history of the church, vulgarity and playing fast and loose with Scripture would have immediately been identified as falsehood, error, or a serious character flaw. However, for some reason, today many in the Church are compromising and excusing ungodly behavior coming from the pulpit.

We tread down this new road to our own demise. In the words of A.W. Tozer, "*We should and must learn that we cannot handle holy things carelessly without suffering serious consequences.*"

**I submit that this ministry attacks the integrity of Scripture, the character of Christ, and feeds the sensual, worldly heart of man.** Therefore, out of love for Mark Driscoll and the Body of Christ, there needs to be close examination and scrutiny of this ministry.

## Rewriting Scripture from a secular script

In Genesis 3, Satan's first line of attack against mankind was to undermine and call into question the authority of God's Word. Yet, it is this very book of the Bible that hits a funny bone for Mark Driscoll. According to Mark, this is where all "good comedy begins." First of all, in the story of Adam and Eve, Driscoll throws out a suggestive, sensual idea about Eve that I guess Mark thinks will amuse his male audience. He says "...God creates a perfect woman who is beautiful, sinless, and naked,- the same kind of woman every guy ever since has been looking for." (*The Radical Reformation*, pg.28.)

Driscoll sets the stage for more mocking of Scripture by describing the Old Testament as "a redneck hillbilly comedy." He finds humor in Jacob, Aaron, Moses, Job, Jeremiah, and Noah. For example, he undermines the seriousness of the messages of Jeremiah, a prophet of God, by describing him as someone "who cries like a newly crowned beauty queen all the time." He laughs at Noah for getting drunk and ending up naked in his tent, and then compares him to "some redneck on vacation." Why would Driscoll find amusement or pleasure in seeing Noah's dignity reduced or undermined?

In light of Driscoll's comments, it is interesting to recall the biblical account of the reaction of Noah's three sons. Unlike the response of his son Ham, the other brothers "turned away and they did not see their father's nakedness"...and surely they did not laugh. On the other hand, for Ham and his descendents,... his response came with a high price. <http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/religionsaves/humor>

Similarly, why would Driscoll compare a story in Scripture to a Monty Python skit and even elaborate on what he describes as the "scatological humor" or "poopy comedy" he sees in Ezekiel 4?

In his series on humor, the New Testament also gets a Driscoll face lift. Without shame, he turns the issue of circumcision found in Galatians 5 into a crude "cut off your pickle joke."

Also, unlike all the biblical scholars who have gone before Mark Driscoll, he comes up with another name than the one given in Scripture to describe the Holy Spirit. In his book *Confessions of a Reformation Rev*, he thanks "God the Ghost" for helping him write his book. In another part of the book, Driscoll just shortens it to "Ghost."

For those who would be alarmed by this cavalier handling of God and His Word, Mark also has an arrogant, cocky response. He says, "...religious people are too serious.....judgmental....they're such a joke."

To the contrary, as believers we are called to fervently contend for the faith, which includes protecting and preserving the integrity of God's Word. Finding amusement and joking with Scripture as acceptable has a way of making sober-minded people begin to treat serious matters less seriously.

Will Mark Driscoll's followers ever read the account of Jeremiah or Noah in the same light after hearing or reading the way Driscoll butchers these stories? Is the serious message of Ezekiel 4 undermined when it has been reduced to "scatological humor"?

These attacks on Scripture are rooted in deceit and falsehood. God's Word says we are to pursue holiness and serve Him acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Where is the holiness? Where is the dignity? Where is the fear of God?

Hence, the groundwork has now been laid for others to come along presenting their own humorous ideas of other passages of scripture. Once this door is allowed to be opened, there is no end in sight.

### **Perverting the character of Christ**

Scripture states, "...out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks", which makes it puzzling to hear or read what flippantly comes out of the mouth of Mark Driscoll. For the sake of a laugh, it appears nothing is off limits.

Mocking and poking fun at Jesus and his family, Mark writes, ".....everytime they (the religious leaders) see Jesus, it agitates them that he is always surrounded by a crowd telling knock-knock jokes to miscreants who love his sense of humor because his perfection had to have included comedic timing." In other communications Mark refers to the King of Kings as "a dude" and uses word pictures depicting Him as "a prize-fighter with a tattoo down his leg..." In Driscoll's human attempt to make Jesus relevant, he turns the spotless lamb into a blemished lamb tarnished with the markings of the streets of Seattle. (*The Radical Reformation*, pg. 30.)

Even in one of Mark Driscoll's most recent projects, the very words of Christ have also been reduced to a marketing slogan to once again serve his own ends, not Christ's. In the words of Christ to Nicodemus, Jesus said, "You must be *born again*." But without shame, Driscoll recklessly destroys the words of God and their intended meaning for the title of his new book called, *PORN-AGAIN Christian*. The cover on the book is also meant to shock. [http://relit.org/porn\\_again\\_christian/](http://relit.org/porn_again_christian/)

Who would tamper with the Words of Light and then use them as an introduction to a discussion on the perverted world of pornography and masturbation? For sure, the enemies of Christ take pleasure in any seed planted that undermines a respect and reverence for God and His word.

One will hear things at this church never heard before about Christ. In a church video series regarding the humanity of Christ, Mark had fun with the question whether or not Jesus went "potty." In response, according to Driscoll, "...yes, Jesus went number one and number two," but he did it "perfectly....never got the toilet all wet."

What was the congregation's response? They laughed.

With wisdom and maturity comes the understanding that some things are better left unsaid. However, it appears Mark Driscoll is willing to plant ideas about Christ in the mind of every reader or listener that would have been unthinkable in any other generation.

For instance, in Driscoll's book, *The Radical Reformation*, he insinuates a perverted homosexual idea regarding Christ. In Chris Rock style, Driscoll states he had to learn "to love Jesus without feeling like we had a thinly veiled homosexual relationship." If this is indeed what Mark Driscoll once thought, he needs to keep his comments to himself, instead of cultivating ideas in the minds of others that serve to undermine the holiness and majesty of Christ. On another page, he paints a similar dishonorable thought saying one of his former pastors taught him "to have a relationship with Jesus that did not feel like he was my lifelong prom date." (*The Radical Reformation*, pg. 14-15).

And just recently, in order to make a point, Mark broached the subject again on a Mars Hill video on the Song of Solomon. At the expense of the reputation of Christ, Driscoll flippantly joked regarding those who differ with him on the interpretation of this book. Driscoll asserted, "Now what happens is some say 'Well, we do believe in the book, and we will teach it, but we're gonna teach it allegorically.' And there's a literal and an allegorical interpretation. They'll say, 'Well the allegorical interpretation, it's not between a husband and a wife, Song of Solomon, love and romance and intimacy; what it is, it's about us and Jesus.' Really?... I hope not... If I get to heaven and this goes down, I don't know what I'm gonna do.... I mean it's gonna be a bad day. Right? I mean seriously... 'You dudes know what I'm talking about... You're like, 'No, I'm not doing that... You know I'm not doing that... I love Him [Jesus] but not like that.'" What was the response of the congregants? They laughed. (Excerpts from Driscoll's first sermon on the Song of Solomon series called, "The Peasant Princess" - start at 27:15)

This lack of respect can also be seen in Driscoll's irreverent account of Jesus' family in his book *Vintage Jesus*. He writes, "Jesus' mom was a poor, unwed teenage girl who was often mocked for claiming she conceived by the Holy Spirit. Most people thought she concocted the crazy story to cover the fact she was knocking boots with some guy in the back seat of a car at the prom." A similar account is given in *The Radical Reformation*, stating Jesus "has a mom whom everyone thinks is a slut, a dad whom they think has the brilliance of a five-watt light bulb for believing the 'virgin birth line, and brothers who likely pummel him frequently, because even God would have to get at least one wedgie from his brothers if he were to be fully human." How can he talk like this without cringing?

Other reckless descriptions about the life of Christ surface in Mark's book stating that by the time Jesus was thirty years old He was "a classic underachiever with no wife, kids, stable career or even much of a home."

Then he plants a less than honest idea about the ministry and character of Christ saying, "....God came to earth and he kicks things off as a bartender...." This inaccurate description of Jesus the bartender feeds into other controversial aspects of this ministry,

which includes Driscoll's promotion of men gathering in bars to drink beer and talk theology. (*The Radical Reformation*, pg.30.)

In a *Christianity Today* article titled, "A Jesus for Real Men," Driscoll is quoted as saying that "real men" avoid the church because it projects a "Richard Simmons, hippie, queer Christ." However, according to Driscoll, "real men" - like Jesus, Paul, and John the Baptists- are "dudes: heterosexual, win-a-fight, punch-you-in-the-nose dudes." The article states this is the sort of Christ men are drawn to- what Driscoll calls "Ultimate Fighting Jesus." <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/april/27.48.html>

But, Jesus is not a dude, He is a King. In the words of A.W. Tozer, Christ is being "courted with a familiarity that reveals a total ignorance of who He is. It is not the reverent intimacy of the adoring saint but the impudent familiarity of a carnal lover." Mark Driscoll may think these images and descriptions of Christ play well in edgy Seattle, but they are a figment of his imagination, not the Word of God.

*"If then I am the Father,  
Where is my honor?  
And if I am the master,  
'Where is My reverence?' says the Lord of Host."  
Malachi 1:6*

## **Feeding the sensual tastes of man**

The mind is the battleground, but in the case of Mark Driscoll, instead of protecting the mind against the crudity and vulgarity of the world, he intentionally uses it. For example, Driscoll appears to have discovered early on that sex sells and that he could use it to draw a crowd. He writes, "I assumed the students and singles were all pretty horny, so I went out on a limb and preached through the Song of Songs. ....Each week I extolled the virtues of marriage, foreplay, oral sex, sacred stripping, and sex outdoors, just as the book teaches...This helped us a lot because apparently a pastor using words like 'penis' and 'oral sex' is unusual, and before you could say "aluminum pole in the bedroom," attendance began to climb steadily to more than two hundred people a week." Even the title of his new book, *Porn-Again Christian*, is case in point of distorting the words of Christ in order to grab the attention of guys to read it.

It is also curious that in spite of Mark Driscoll's acknowledgement that many of the young men at Mars Hill struggle with pornography, Mark would intentionally and frequently plant himself in a barbershop filled with pornography. In his own words, Mark describes his barbershop as "providing the *finest* selection of waiting area pornography in our city." But, isn't the word "finest" a rather odd way of describing perverted material?

Would Mark recommend this same barbershop to other young men at Mars Hill? Since Mark details in his book, *The Radical Reformation*, that he even takes his own young son with him to his barber, a flamboyant transsexual, I will assume the answer is possibly "Yes."

Similarly, Mark's response to a phone call he received in the middle of the night from a young man also raises questions regarding his choice of words and judgment. Driscoll writes that the phone rang at "some godforsaken hour...when I'm not even a Christian." He said, "...some college guy was crying."

Driscoll said that he tried to "muster up my inner pastor...and tried to pretend I [he] was concerned." Since the caller was beating around the bush, Mark blurted out, "What have you done?" When the caller confessed he had watched porno and masturbated, Driscoll actually asked the upset caller, "Was it good porno?..." As expected, the caller was left speechless by his question. Then, Mark told him, "Well, you've already watched the whole porno and tugged your tool, so what am I suppose to do?" The caller answered him, "You are my pastor, so I thought that maybe you could pray with me." But, to the contrary, Mark wrote, " ....I did not want to pray so I just said the first thing that came to mind...Jesus thank you for not killing him for being a pervert. Amen." According to Driscoll, the caller was still left unclear about what he was suppose to do, so in Driscoll style, he told the caller, ".....A naked lady is good to look at, so get a job, get a wife, ask her to get naked, and look at her instead." What message is Mark Driscoll sending to unmarried, young men by his crude, disrespectful remarks about women?

As I implied at the beginning of this memo, some of the information and material advocated by Mark Driscoll is so tawdry and immoral that I do not even feel comfortable detailing it in this memo. Therefore, here are links to Mark Driscoll's advice to married Christian couples introducing them to unnatural sexual behaviors and other perversions. One would expect this kind of counseling from controversial Dr. Ruth, not an evangelical pastor.

<http://blog.marshillchurch.org/2008/11/30/question-21-can-i-perform-anal-sex-on-my-wife/>

<http://blog.marshillchurch.org/2008/11/30/question-22-can-we-use-sex-toys/>

In another one of Driscoll's church stories, he tells about a time of exhaustion when he snapped at the young men at his church. Describing them as a chronic masturbator, a porn addict, banging weak-willed girls like a screen door in a stiff breeze, etc., Mark says he cussed out a poor guy, losing his mind to the point that he thinks he actually cuffed him upside the head. In a follow-up meeting, he preached to the young men about manhood, but then, in my opinion, he snapped again.

According to Mark, his explanation for getting their act together was " ....because you can't charge hell with your pants around your ankles, a bottle of lotion in one hand, and a kleenex in the other." He concluded the meeting by handing "each man two stones and told them that on this day God was giving them their balls back to get the courage to do kingdom work." As a result, Mars Hill began having "boot camps" for men, teaching them how to get a wife, have sex with that wife, ....buy a house...study the Bible...and brew decent beer."

Mark Driscoll also disrespectfully relates the story about the time he sought the counsel of Rick Warren. Driscoll said, "I emailed Rick Warren, assuming that he is now so big that he must wear a cup all the time just to get through an average day."

As previously mentioned, according to Mark Driscoll, brewing beer appears to be another important revelation on how to grow a ministry in liberal Seattle and reach the next generation. In fact, in Mark's book, he says, "My Bible study convicted me of my sin of abstinence from alcohol. So in repentance, I drank a hard cider over lunch with our worship pastor. This revelation led Driscoll to conclude, "I personally long for the return of the glory days of Christian pubs where God's men gather to drink beer and talk theology." Mark also offers up some possible names for brews: "Alleluia Ale" and "Lucifer Light." I ask, where does Mark's Lucifer Light come from? (*The Radical Reformation*, pg.146, 147).

What will be the results of the clock turning back to what Mark describes as "the glory days" when men meet in the bars and their wives stay home taking care of the kids? What message is he sending to young men? It is not too far off base for me to suggest that the message sent is men drinking beer and male crudity is cool.

In fact, regarding Mars Hill's worship leader, Mark describes him as a manly man, who brews his own beer. Mark says he was impressed with his worship leader because "most of the worship dudes I have heard are not very dudely...they seem to be....exceedingly chickified from .....singing prom songs to Jesus."

The Missouri Baptists have experienced first-hand the fruits of this ministry when they discovered they had given money to one of Mark Driscoll's Acts 29 church planting organizations that was meeting for Bible study in a St. Louis pub. The issue came to light when the Baptist Press broke the story, which was followed by a front page article in the Sunday edition of the St. Louis Dispatch titled "Beer and the Bible." As a result, not only did the Missouri Baptists withdraw their financial support, but they have also compiled extensive research on the negative influence of the ministry of Mark Driscoll.

<http://www.mbcpathway.com/article126214c1089833.htm>

In addition, it is confusing why someone who markets a book claiming he wants to help young men overcome sexual addictions, yet himself uses sexual crudity and ungodly remarks to struggling men to make a point.

Furthermore, why does he frequent a barbershop filled with pornography if he wants to help men overcome sexual temptations? Why does he even plant the idea that all men ever since Adam and Eve have been looking for a naked woman like Eve? Why would he detail the story about the attractive woman at the airport who offered him what Driscoll describes as her "impressive" "sexual favors"? It is also curious why Mark would use the language he does to describe this woman, whom Mark says was "Hot....like hell." (*Confessions of a Reformation Rev*, pg. 128.)

Instead of a pastor spiritually lifting the Body of Christ up to a higher standard, Mark is dragging the Church through the gutter. As the prophet Jeremiah lamented, my people "... were not at all ashamed, Nor did they know how to blush." (Jeremiah 6:15, 8:12)

Likewise, we find ourselves in the same situation. Perhaps the reason why so many excuse his behavior is because they have become so desensitized and seduced by the culture themselves that they simply do not blush and cannot discern what is happening.

## **The far-reaching influence of Mark Driscoll**

Other reckless nuances also put Driscoll's church on the map. Early on in his ministry, he became known to many as "Mark the cussing pastor." Driscoll writes that he was given this title from his good friend, Donald Miller, the emergent author of "Blue Like Jazz." (Miller was also the one who gave this years benediction at the Democratic National Convention.) Although Driscoll acknowledges he was embarrassed when he read about this account of himself in Miller's book, the title lives on. For example, the headline in a March 2008 Australian news source announced Driscoll's landing in Australia with the headline, "The Cussing Pastor Coming to the Coast."

However, there a lot of other things coming out of the mouth of Mark Driscoll, which should cause him more embarrassment than this title that was simply an honest description by one of Mark's friends. <http://www.thecrazyaustralian.com/the-cussing-pastor-coming-to-the-coast/>

Apparently, whether it is sex or bragging about how "tough" it was for him to preach on Lake Washington with frat guys "mooning my [his] church" with "a backdrop of their hairy heinies," or describing the "well-endowed young women passing by on a boat, lifting up their shirts," or detailing his gross account of "messaging my[his] pants while preaching with the stomach flu," Driscoll seems to go to any length to create interest in his books and his ministry. For sure, who would ever expect a pastor to describe his flu ordeal saying "getting sent to hell would be an upgrade." He proudly declares, "I crapped myself about fifteen minutes into the sermon and was left with a terrible dilemma. Do I finish the sermon and just not move much on the stage? Do I,....sneek off and clean up the oil slick?" Instead of excusing himself like a mature adult, he preached for another 45 minutes and then adds more crudity to his story and writing, "...I tried to breath out of my mouth to lessen the stench." This is the language and conduct of a child, not a man ready for the pulpit. ( *Confessions of a Reformission Rev*, pg. 88, and 176-177).

Mark's controversy and crudity has gained popularity in many different circles. John Dickson, Anglican director of the Centre for Public Christianity, says Driscoll is the best preacher of generation Y, likening his "motormouth style to that of a stand-up comic...He's made conservative Christianity almost sexy, which is a most astonishing thing." I also noticed on Driscoll's Acts 29 website the comment that even church planting can be "sexy." <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/08/22/1219262525190>

All of the disgusting comments and dirty talk coming from this pastor raises serious questions regarding his influence. However, there is one thing we can say for sure, . . . he is making quite an impression.

<http://www.sfepulpit.com/2008/09/17/john-piper-mark-driscoll-and-harsh-language/>

According to Driscoll, his innovative ideas on how to grow a church put him in the spotlight. He wrote, "A buzz got out about our church, and Christian pastors and leaders from around the country and the world began dropping in to check out what we were doing." This publicity put him in contact with Bill Hybel's Willow Creek and the Leadership Network, which with Mark Driscoll's help planted the seeds for the Emergent Church. Although Driscoll has since challenged and distanced himself from some of the teachings of his emergent friends, on his websites he has recommended books by contemplative writer, Richard Foster, Dallas Willard and a book called *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. It is also interesting to note that the Leadership Network is a major promoter of emergent leader Brian McClaren and other liberal innovators such as Bill Hybel. Mark Driscoll has nothing but praise for this group, which he uses to this day to promote his books and ministry. This subject alone is an entire chapter of a book.

## Conclusion

In a *Christianity Today* article about Mark Driscoll on August 23, 2008, Pastor John MacArthur is quoted as saying not only that Driscoll has an "infatuation with the vulgar aspects of contemporary society," but also, "[T]he lifestyle he models - especially his easygoing familiarity with all this world's filthy fads - practically guarantees that [his disciples] will make little progress toward authentic sanctification."

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/september/30.44.html>

If this is the case, which I agree it is, I reiterate my question: "Why" is Mark Driscoll a keynote speaker this coming April 21-23 at The Gospel Coalition's National Conference in Chicago? <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about>

With all due respect to the men who are leading this organization, it is a mockery of the Christian faith to have Mark Driscoll speak on the topic of "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth."

According to MacArthur Study Bible, rightly dividing the word of truth means "cutting it straight - a reference to the exactness demanded by such trades as carpentry, masonry....Precision and accuracy are required in biblical interpretation ..." Why?... Because when we are handling the holy Word of God, nothing less is acceptable.

What comes out of the mouth of Mark Driscoll, and how he handles Scripture is not only shameful, but also an embarrassment to the Body of Christ. Regardless of Mark Driscoll's ability to deliver a serious presentation of the gospel message, and draw people in off the streets of Seattle, something is spiritually unhealthy and wrong with this ministry. Based on the concerns raised by others and the questions raised in this memo, it is all the more

confusing that evangelical leaders are excusing the conduct and teachings of Mark Driscoll.

It is the opinion of this writer that there needs to be a close examination of this ministry. Mark Driscoll is undermining biblical and historical Christianity, and lacks the wisdom, discernment and maturity to lead. If the church cannot see it, we are further down the downgrade than we think.

**"Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us."**

**Titus 2:6**