

# Apostolic Christianity

*First Things*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6  
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This morning, I would encourage you to open your Bibles to two very specific places. Both are in the New Testament. Our primary text is going to be in 1 Thessalonians 2, however, our supplementary text is going to be the book of Acts 4 and 5. And allow me to go ahead and say in advance today's message is going to feel kind of like a biblical tennis match, and what I mean by that is we're gonna be going back and forth between 1 Thessalonians 2 and the book of Acts 4 and 5.

If you are a guest or visitor with us, I want to welcome you to a very strategic journey through the book of 1 Thessalonians and the reason it's strategic is that what we know as this book of the Bible, chronologically, is the very first book of the Bible that the Lord gave us, through whom we know as the Apostle Paul. This is important because Jesus Christ raises from the dead, the church as we know it is established, and for 20 years there is no "written word" that is given through whom we know as the Apostle Paul, and this is important because I think it's critical to see what are the first things that God shared with us, the church. Not only today, but even then, we live in a world that is filled with creeds and confessions, discussion and debate and dissension and division, and oftentimes, when we use the phrase or we talk about Christianity, that umbrella gives itself to such a myriad of expressions, preferences, ideology, and maybe it's just me, but maybe you're one of those as well who've said, "You know what? With all that we see happening and all that is occurring out there, maybe we ought to just go back and look at what the first church actually looked like. What did they believe? What did they subscribe to? What did they struggle with? What did they not struggle with?"

And so our journey is strategic because we're going back to the earliest days of the church and discovering what is it or who are we designed and supposed to be, and today when we get to 1 Thessalonians 2, I want to discuss what I've entitled "Apostolic Christianity." Now when I say the word apostolic, I don't mean a warmed over, overly expressive, neo-Pentecostalism. That's not what I mean. What I really mean is what does it look like to have a truly authentic expression of biblical Christianity. In fact, in verse 6 of 1 Thessalonians 2 today, whom we know as Paul is going to say, "We did this as the apostles of Christ," and the reason we're going back to chapter 4 and 5 of the book of Acts, this is pre-Saul of Tarsus's conversion. I want you to see that this isn't something new that Paul came up with, this isn't something new that the church at Thessalonica said,

"Well, we're going to do it a little bit different than everybody else." No, what we're going to see today is that the call upon our life is the same today as it was in 1 Thessalonians 2, and it is the same as it was in the very earliest days of the church in Acts 4 and 5.

So beginning today in 1 Thessalonians 2, it says,

1 For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: 2 But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. 3 For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: 4 But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. 5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: 6 Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

Now what we're going to discover is that the early church, the Apostle Paul, and we should have a certain attitude which produces a certain action, which should lead to a very specific ambition. But before we do that, I want to acknowledge something that I think is strategic and critical to the text. Notice how verse 1 of chapter 2 begins, "We did not come to you in vain," and yet you read that in Philippi they "suffered and shamefully entreated." Even there in Thessalonica they were treated poorly. The reason this is critical is back in the book of Acts 5:29, there's a man by the name of Gamaliel. He's a Jewish rabbi and there are those that are in opposition to the early church. They come to him saying, "We don't like these new believers. We don't enjoy what they're preaching. We don't enjoy how they're living. In fact, they're making things difficult for us. We want you to put a stop to it." And there in verse 29 of chapter 5, this famous rabbi says, "Let me give you some advice. If this is of God, you're never going to be able to stop it. If this is of man, like many others, it will just simply fade away." What we see in verse 1 and 2 when he says, "We did not come in vain," I want you to hear something the Apostle Paul acknowledged that we need to have in our lives today: it did not matter whether those in Thessalonica accepted, received, or agreed with him, the tomb was still empty. It did not matter if they received the message with gladness or rejected it wholeheartedly, it's not going to impact the fact that one day Jesus Christ is coming back. What we discover in this chapter is this, that you do not have to be in the statistical majority to actually be accurate with the truth. And so when he says, "I didn't come in vain," what he is saying is Jesus has risen, Jesus is coming back and whether you accept it or reject it does not change what is true.

So today, as oftentimes as Bible believers, we find ourselves in the statistical minority, we find ourselves as maybe the only one in our family, the only one at the office, the only one at school who not only agrees with scripture but is attempting to live it out, your life, your testimony is not in vain just because you're shamefully treated and just because you run into a bunch of contention. Now that being said, what should our attitude be? Notice

what says in verse 2, "But after we had suffered before and were shamefully entreated, as you know, at Philippi we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel even with much contention." Our attitude should be that we possess boldness, that we should not be shameful of the message of which we believe, nor the Savior that we believe upon. Notice the verbiage that's used around verse 2, "shamefully entreated. We suffer. There was much contention." Those words describe the early church, and they oftentimes describe us as well. When you are bold with what you believe, the majority of this old world is not going to agree with you and they may treat you poorly. You may experience some level or are part of suffering, and don't get me wrong, there will be contention anytime you use a phrase that is similar to, "Well, that may be what you think but this is what the Bible says." Again, boldness means that we continue to believe and continue to speak, "Thus saith the Lord."

Now I want you to go back to Acts 4. I want us to go back to the days even before Saul met the Lord on the road to Damascus. Chapter 4 of the book of Acts, the early believers had experienced Pentecost. They'd been on this spiritual high. But soon thereafter, they suffered. They were shamefully entreated. They met with contention. Some of them met law enforcement who placed them in a confined area for a while and basically told them they should no longer be and do and say the things they were doing. Beginning in chapter 4, verse 23, there is a prayer meeting that takes place. In verse 23 through 28 basically the prayer goes a little something like this. "God, this is who you are. We're simply doing what you've asked us to do. Why aren't things working out?" What I want to focus on though is verse 29. I want you to see a group of believers who are experiencing contention, a group of believers who are experiencing suffering, a group of believers who had adversity in their lives. It says, listen to their prayer in verse 29, "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." Isn't that interesting that when in an environment of contention and suffering, the one prayer they had was, "God, may we be bold. May we not back down. May we not lose faith even in the midst of the environment or the circumstances we find ourselves in." You get to verse 30 and listen what they say, "By stretching forth thine hand," and there's all these talks of signs and miracles and wonders, they never said that would come from them. They said, "Lord, we need you to do this." And then in verse 31 it says, "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."

Now you hear those passages and it's so easy to fall in the trap of saying, "Well, our day is just different than it was back then." Well, if you go back 2,000 years ago into the area in which the Lord first communicated these words, it was eerily similar to today. It was a hedonistic, heathen, very consumer-minded, carnal, fleshly, materialistic environment. Sound like our world today? In fact, not only then, but you and I today, whether you know it or not, did you know that you're living the fulfillment of what Isaiah spoke about in chapter 5 of his book.

There in chapter 5, beginning verse 20, he makes this statement, "Woe unto them who call light darkness and darkness light. Woe unto them that call good evil and evil good."

Allow me to make a very simple observation when it comes to boldness because I think sometimes we forget not only are we living in similar times since 2,000 years ago, but we're living in the fulfillment of Isaiah times. Just a very simple observation: in our culture today, if you subscribe to, if you are convicted of, if you believe, if you promote anything that is contrary to the Bible, you're not only allowed at the seat at the table, but you are celebrated, you are paraded, listen to this, and you're protected. Our culture actually will protect your rights to be contrary to scripture. But let's just say hopefully for reality but just for a hypothetical, let's just say that you have the conviction and the belief, now I know this is going to seem so far-fetched and please forgive my gift of sarcasm here, that marriage should actually look like what the Bible says, that raising children should actually look like what the Bible says, and that our ethics and our decisions in life should be according to what the Bible says. You know that doesn't just put you on the fringe of our society, it makes you a freak. That's what it does. Isn't that funny that decades ago, behavior that was contrary to scripture was marginalized. Today, it's celebrated and biblical life is now marginalized. You and I today live in a world where boldness is desperately needed because you may be the only voice in the room that says, "Thus saith the Lord." And so when it says that they came with boldness, look at what it says around it, there was contention, there was suffering, there was difficulty. I want you to hear me: it wasn't tiptoeing through the tulips, it was difficult to stand strong for what they believed. That was their attitude, and that attitude produced some actions.

Back to 1 Thessalonians 2. Did I mention the tennis match we're about to have together? In verse 4 it says, "But as we are allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which tries our hearts." This attitude of boldness, I want you to hear me clearly, doesn't mean they were rude and crude and socially unacceptable. What it meant was every decision that they made and every path that they journeyed, they consciously said, "We want to do what pleases God even if it doesn't please men," and more often than not, if it pleases men, it is probably not pleasing to God.

Now I want you to notice again the words that surround that statement. It talks about in verse 3, we didn't use deceit, we didn't use uncleanness, we didn't use guile. Later, it says we didn't use flattering words. We weren't covetous with our mannerisms. In other words, they did not stoop themselves down to the level of the world, but they took the high road of scripture in their lives. So what does this actually mean? What does it look like to say, "You know what? I'm not going to please men. I'm going to please God."

Go back to Acts 5. In Acts 5, the same believers who prayed the prayer in chapter 4 remain bold and guess what? They find themselves incarcerated once again. You see a cycle here. The suffering continues. The shamefully entreated continues. The contention continues. But they do not express guile. They don't use covetousness. They don't do the things that are described there in 1 Thessalonians 2. Then you get to chapter 5, verse 27. I want you to hear what is asked of the early believers. Now, by the way, this is asked of you each and every day whether you know it or not. It says, "And when they had brought them and sent them before the council, the high priest asked him, saying, Did we straightly command you that you should not teach in this name? Behold you have filled

Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Push pause for a moment. Let me speak a little Southernese to you this morning, basically what this high priest is saying is, "Y'all keep talking about Jesus and you're messing everything up. Why don't you Christians just get in the corner, shut up and let us do what we very well want to do." I want you to hear the response in verse 29. It says, "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said," listen to this, "We ought to obey God rather than men." In other words, as a believer in Jesus Christ, we cannot go against scripture just because it's not popular. We cannot violate the conviction of the Holy Spirit just because we are in the statistical minority. And yet today, much like those days, we are faced each and every day with decisions, with paths, with journeys where we must make the decision are we going to do it God's way or are we going to do it man's way? And here's what happens when you render that decision to do it man's way, what ends up happening is you compromise God's way.

Now that word compromise has a lot of different definitions but allow me to give you a biblical understanding of what it means to "exhibit compromise." It means to exchange an eternal biblical truth for a temporary blessing. In other words, compromise takes place when you take "Thus saith the Lord," you push it to the side and say, "Well, this one decision won't hurt that much. This one journey, it's not that big a deal. It's only one time." Here's the problem, that one term turns into two, into three, into four, and you and I look up today and we have an award ceremony celebrating the music of the land with people actually dressed as a red horned devil. And you say to yourself how did we get here? You all realize that didn't start last week? It didn't start last month. It didn't even start last year. What we need to acknowledge, what we need to understand is this, that the compromise of authentic Christianity in our culture has been happening for decades and year by year we give a little more peace of property to the enemy. You can have this. Then you can have that. Have you heard the old statement you give the devil an inch, he'll take an entire yard? And that's exactly what he has done.

Now let me share with you an observation. Now those of you men who attend our Tuesday morning men's Bible study, this is a phrase I use as of late. I just joke around that I'm just embracing the gray that is in my life. Here's the phrase: I've now hit the stage of my life where I'm experiencing multi-generational wisdom. Now, some of you are thinking, "What is multi-generational wisdom?" You get to that point in life when you've seen the cycle of decisions in life and you can see it coming because you've already seen it come two to three times and you've seen it gone. In other words, you can see in the distance what is happening and say, "Well, we've been down this road and I know what this is going to look like." The problem is because we got gray on the head or in the beard nobody believes us because they say, "Well, surely it's not going to happen this time." And guess what? We repeat the same mistake over and over and over.

You say, "Pastor, where are you leading?" Allow me to give you some multi-generational observed wisdom: whether it is in your life personally, whether it is in your family's life, whether it is in a community's life, a church's life, if you've ever found yourself in one of those places where you're in difficulty, you're struggling, you're at your wit's end, whatever analogy you want to use, and you call me, you realize that I'm really the first

person you call, I'm the last person. You've been through all that mess, and do you know one of the things I've observed? Now I realize before I say this, God is sovereign. God is omnipotent. He can do what he wants when he wants. But for the majority of the time, the length of time it took you to get in the mess is the time it takes you to get out. Now that is multi-generational wisdom, is what that is. Here's our problem: we look back at the last 50-60 years of our culture and we say, "God, we want it reversed by next Sunday. And actually, if you do it by Wednesday it would make most of us happy." The problem is that it's not about the myriad of decisions that have been compromised in days past, it's about the decision that lies before you today. It's about the scenario that lies before you today and what you discover back in Acts 5 is that Peter and the other apostles didn't refer back to chapter 4, they didn't refer back to chapter 3, they didn't look back at all the other stuff, they said, "Right now what you're asking me to do, I cannot do because it would not be pleasing to God."

And so when we talk about an authentic bold Christianity, it's not just saying, "I want to be bold," it's saying, "I'm going to follow that with the action that when this presents itself, or that presents itself, I am going to choose God's way and not man's way." Which leads to one final thing, if we're gonna have that attitude, we're gonna have that action, then we need some ambition. We need some marching orders. We need some direction as we not only leave from this place, but as we get up each and every day, which takes us back to 1 Thessalonians 2:6. He says, "Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome to you, as the apostles of Christ." I think that's fascinating that even in the midst of this attitude of boldness, this action of saying that we are resolved to follow the Lord and not man, he says, "but we don't want to be a burden to you. We don't want to be a bother to you. We don't want to make things more difficult for you just because we're going to do the things of God."

Go back to the book of Acts 5. We're going to bring it back full circle. Remember that initial allusion to that high priest who was presented with the option of dismissing these early believers? He gave some historical examples. He had multi-generational wisdom. He said, "Guys, I've seen this before." And so he said, "Here's the deal, just let them be who they're going to be and if it's of God you can't stop it, if it's of man, it'll fade away." I want to pick up the story in verse 40. In verse 40 of Acts 5, I want you to hear not only what happens to these early apostles, I want you to see how they respond. It says, "And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them." Push, pause. Did the suffering stop? No. Did the contention stop? No. "When they had beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council," listen to this, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Now if that is not the flip of the proverbial script of our culture today. Most of us run from this. Most of us try to avoid at all cost anything that would remotely look like this and it says they actually rejoice. You look at the early church, you look at the first couple of decades and even centuries, and those early believers, they considered it the greatest mark of their faith to actually lose their life for the sake of the gospel, and yet most of us today compromise on a daily basis so we don't suffer anything for the sake of the gospel.

But I want you to notice the last verse, "And daily in the temple, and in every house," this is critical, "they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." Why is this critical? Because in your flesh you are tempted to respond in a fleshly manner, in your flesh you are tempted to implement the same tactics that were done unto you and unto us as people of the faith, in our flesh we have a tendency to be fleshly. That's why Galatians 4 says if you sow to the flesh, you will reap of the flesh. If you sow to the Spirit, you will reap of the Spirit. What I want you to hear is this: their ambition was not to become more like the world in their strategy, their ambition was just keep it on Jesus and he's going to work everything out.

Now, let me pull back for just a moment. The early church experienced a very similar culture to ours. They weren't debating, they weren't divisive over the man-made preferences that oftentimes our culture has brought in to the church today. They kept it on the main thing. They said, "We will not talk about anybody else but Jesus." At the end of the day, to use secular terminology, the cycle has got to stop. At some point if you really want to live this thing called Christianity the way the Bible says it, you've got to have an attitude of boldness, you've got to have an action saying, "I don't care what man says. I'm going to do what God says." And you've got to have an ambition that, "Even if suffering is the byproduct, I'm willing to do what I've got to do to keep the spotlight on Jesus."

Today, I'm going to close with a story that I'm sure may or may not be well-known to you. It's one of those stories where you can go and Google it and research the veracity there, and it's a populous story. But today, it's a very poignant story. A story hundreds of years ago. The Roman Empire, they had athletic competitions, much like our culture will experience today, except unlike helmets and shoulder pads, theirs were armor and bore a literal sword. It's called the gladiator matches. It happened to be that on a very specific day there was a little frail monk who decided he was going to attend one of these gladiator matches. He had heard about it. He'd heard the rumors of the carnage, the destruction, the vileness and the vulgar therein but he decided to see it for himself. Because he was late to the game, he was in the nosebleed, like oftentimes we've sat at sporting events. He was up at the very top and what he saw, literally he could not believe that these men for entertainment purposes were killing each other on the courts of battle. He's there all by himself. He's not with a group. He's small in stature. He is outnumbered 50,000 to 1. But he is known for a very famous statement. He simply shouted out, "Stop the madness!"

Well, as you can imagine, as the blood is being spilled, nobody cared, nobody listened, so he decided, "I'm going to get a little more attention," so he made his way down further into the crowd. He's about midway down, blood is spilled and he screams out, "Stop the madness!" Nobody listened. Nobody cared. So he made his way down to the railing of the arena. He's leaning over. He is screaming to the gladiators. He is screaming, "Stop the madness!" To no avail. So this little monk by the name of Telemachus decides something has got to change. He jumps in the arena. He stands between two of the gladiators, and he pleads with them, "Please stop the madness!" It was there, those would be his last words. The gladiators would take his life right there in the middle of the arena.

I'd say Telemachus was pretty bold. I would say that he would rather please God than man. He was willing, if necessary, to suffer whatever the cost was. You and I have the privilege of looking back through the lens of history and history tells us that there wasn't another single gladiator match fought in that arena again. Here's the problem: we all want to sit back and write emails and get on social media and scream and holler, "This is ridiculous! Somebody's gotta stop this!" When what 1 Thessalonians 2 is saying, well, authentic Christianity says we'll get in the arena and say, "No more. Thus saith the Lord."

Now, do you understand why we see such little authentic Christianity? Now do you understand why we see so little of 1 Thessalonians 2 in our world? Because rather than sitting back and enjoying the thrills and thrills of life, we've got to be willing, if necessary, to experience what Paul wrote in this chapter, what Telemachus lived out, and what may befall us if we actually say, "Stop the madness!"

Let's pray with their heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe this morning as we come to this time of decision, maybe the cry to stop the madness isn't about the culture out there but it's about the war that's happening in your heart in this very room. Maybe today you would say that arena of battle is really what I'm battling with sin. Maybe today you say I am in that warfare. I'm struggling with what the world is preaching and what the Holy Spirit is convicting. The Bible says in Romans 10:13, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe today the stopping of the madness in your life is hitting your proverbial needs and saying, "Jesus, I can't do this anymore. I give up trying to do it on my own. I need you to fight the battle of sin for me." If you're that person, whether you're here in person, whether you're online, whether you're listening on the radio, let me encourage you just to cry out to God. You don't have to do it out loud. You don't have to do like Telemachus did and scream to the whole arena. It can be your heart's cry. It doesn't have to be the phrase that I or others would use. This is you're calling out to God, but maybe it would go a little something like this. "God, today the madness has got to stop in my life. Lord, I confess the reason that I'm experiencing it is because of my own sin. God, I've been places I should have never been. I've done things I should have never done. God, you know my heart and you know the war that is therein. So God, today I believe, I believe that my sin is leading me according to your word to death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Today, God, I believe the madness of my life is my sin condition, and the only thing that's going to stop it is Jesus Christ, so the best way I know, God, I believe, I'm confessing my belief, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ was so concerned about my soul's condition that he rejected all opportunity for personal gain and lived a sinless life. God, today I believe that when Jesus Christ allowed himself to be nailed to the cross, Lord, it was my sin that put him there. And God, today I believe that three days later when Jesus Christ rose from the grave, he actually made it possible for my sin to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to the issues and the struggles of this thing called life, but there is one thing I know, I have got a sin problem in my life that only Jesus can fix. The best way I know how I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. God, today I just want to turn my life over to you."



With our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who for the very first time, you just cried out to God. In a moment I'm gonna pray for us. We're gonna stand and sing and I just wanna encourage you just to step out and step forward. We would love to celebrate with you. We would love to pray with you and to pray for you. Maybe today you say, "Pastor, I've already taken care of that but like the four people coming at the 11:00 o'clock service, I need to fall in believer's baptism." Or maybe you're like the people we meet each and every week who say, "This is our spiritual home. This is our church." Whatever the decision is, we would love the privilege of just spending some time with you. But maybe today, before I pray, it's not about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe today there's a situation in your own personal life, your family's life, whatever life, that that phrase, "Stop the madness," needs to take place. Maybe today it's not about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe it's about stepping out of here saying, "No longer are we going to go the path of man in this area."

*Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, Lord, the line has been drawn, are we going to do it your way or are we going to do it man's way? God, today I pray for each and every one of us that we would be men and women, boys and girls, of boldness in action that puts the spotlight and the attention on you and you alone. May you be the sole focus of our lives, not just in this moment of decision, but from this moment forward. Help us, O God, today to ignore all voices but yours and to simply say, "I'd rather please God than man." It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*