

Pastor and author Leith Anderson shared a story about a number of years ago... when he and three others were traveling to a Communist country where Christians were regularly being persecuted. ... They did not have a direct flight to their destination... so they had to stay in a neighboring country for one evening. ...That night... while having dinner with a few fellow Christians in that country... Anderson and his companions were approached about smuggling in some Bibles for the underground church. Anderson immediately refused to do so... pointing out that it was illegal. The Christians in that country would not take no for an answer, though. They told Anderson they would return in the morning with the Bibles and that Anderson's group should "ask God what they should do." ...Anderson writes about the tough decisions that would follow:

Overnight, I made a decision. A Bible or two might be risky, but not impossible. However, I wasn't prepared for the following morning's delivery. It was a small library of Bibles, books about Christianity, study tools, and videos.

I truly can't explain why we did what we did. We divided up the Bibles... books... and videos among the four of us and loaded up every available space in our suitcases... carry-on bags... and purses. ... It was not a comfortable experience. ... When nearing our destination... the flight attendants distributed customs forms representing our names... passport numbers... and the answers to pointed questions. ... Were we bringing guns... narcotics... or literature into the country? ... The four of us sat paralyzed over what to write. ... If we said we were not bringing literature, we were lying. If we checked that we were bringing books and Bibles... we were in serious trouble. ...

It was one of those moments when the Holy Spirit gave a simple solution that we would not have thought about ourselves. ... We didn't answer the question. We left it blank. ... I can't say that we were confident in our choice... but that's what we did. ... As we passed through immigration surrounded by armed guards and immigration officers... our forms were carefully scrutinized and all four of us were waved through.

What I next remember is the secret night meeting when we turned over the Bibles and literature to Christians from the underground church. Their faces still remain with me all my life.

Ministry and courage ! ... Our passage this morning teaches us that they must go hand-in-hand... Do you very much courage in your Christian life...? Do you have enough of it...? Do you sometimes find it hard to bring up a subject that needs to be discussed? ... Some people are very sensitive. They do not like to be reminded of certain things. That... however... is when courage is required.

We see a tremendous amount of courage in the Apostle Paul. Our passage this morning... not only shows us how courageous Paul was... (he had ministry boldness...) but it also shows us how we can become more bold in our ministry for Christ.

If we were to read right now Acts chapter 16... it would show us all that Paul went through... just before he came to Thessalonica to start the church... to whom he is writing. He had been "shamefully treated," and had "suffered" tremendously in Philippi. ... Actually... this was one of the three times when he was beaten with thick rods and then thrown into prison... a Roman form of punishment... for non-citizens. There... although

he and Silas were thrust into stocks and held immobile... they began to sing praises unto God.

Furthermore... Paul had suffered insult and mockery by being stripped of his clothes in public by order of the magistrates in Philippi. ... His Roman citizenship had been ignored. ... Even when he was freed by an earthquake... he was summarily ordered out of town by the authorities. Yet he went bravely on to Thessalonica knowing that the same thing would happen there. Thessalonica was short distance away. ... Surely Paul knew... what would... and did happen. Their persecutors would follow them there.

You cannot read the life of Paul and fail to see the tremendous courage he demonstrated in his ministry. ... When a riot broke out in Ephesus he actually tried to face down a howling mob who were bent on killing him. He had to be restrained by his friends to keep from sacrificing himself to the mob's fury.

Where did he get his courage? Some say that Paul was courageous by nature... that he would take on anything... or anyone. ...But I think that I can show you certain verses... which indicate... that was not true. ... He was a lot like you and me. (Here is one such verse – 1 Cor 2:3) ... When he came into Corinth and began to preach... he did so... in his own words... "*with much fear and trembling.*" Corinth intimidated him. (And Paul is in Corinth... as he writes this letter to the Thessalonians.)

Some of you who want to reach out to your friends and family members feel intimidated at times by the prevailing worldliness in your friends

home... or at public meetings. Paul felt that very strongly. In Ephesus, he wrote, "*there was fighting without and fear within*," (2 Cor 7:5). ... No, Paul was not naturally courageous. ... He was like most of us. ... (OK... let me speak for myself...) By nature I am a dedicated coward. The few times in my life that I have shown courage were simply the grace of God at work.

So... I am excited about these verses we are about to study... Paul declares very clearly... both negatively and positively... what lay behind his courage.

But let me say... just a bit more... before we turn there. ... Many people can appear to be courageous and bold... but for the wrong reasons. Paul lists several of those reasons in today's passage.

First... we will read... that he did not preach out of "error or uncleanness." In other words... he did not come peddling some particular private revelation.

Today... we are confronted with a parade of false teachers who pretend to have a Christian message... We have popular television showmen... like Joel Olsteen... who promise you that God never intends for there to be sickness or hardship in your life. ... And then we have popular television personalities like Oprah Winfrey... who is leading millions away from Christ and into New Age spiritism. ... On the surface they appear to be bold and courageous. They seem to be driven by conviction -- and perhaps they are in some degree -- but it is wrong conviction. ... Contrast them with Paul... who did not come to Thessalonica peddling any private doctrine. It was the truth of God... confirmed by the prophets and by Jesus Christ himself.

Nor did he come inviting people to sexual license... encouraging them to indulge themselves... to throw over all moral bonds and do whatever they liked. That is how the false teachers... and philosophical systems attract a big following today. "Be your own god..." ... But these man-pleasing ideas were never part of the apostle's doctrine.

Also guile... flattery... and greed... played no part in Paul's preaching. Not so with the many false teachers... who appeal to the ego... with guile... flattery... and greed. ... They appear to be bold and uncompromising... but they stroke and charm the sheer ego... of their followers.

Many offer a promise of prosperity. If you follow them... and send them money... they say... you will become rich. ... This was not Paul's doctrine, either. As we read our passage today... and see Paul proclaim all that he is NOT... we don't have to look very far today... and see example after example... of those that are. All around us are examples of those who allure followers with sexual promiscuity... guile... flattery... and greed. ... Paul is NOT like them in those areas... But there is one area... however... where he is... Furthermore... Paul even excels them in this one area. He demonstrates far more of it... and that is courage.

Today... we are going to learn how we can be more BOLD for Christ.

When Paul came to Thessalonica... he came in boldness. ... In other words... he didn't slow down because of his previous experience in Phillipi. He didn't play down the gospel. ... After his terrifying experience... Paul didn't say... *"Well... I guess I better change my approach. I'm going to have to be more tactful... and less outspoken about the gospel."* ... (As a

dedicated coward... I may have thought this way.) But Paul didn't. ... He spoke right out... just as he had done at Philippi.

It would have been so easy for Paul to rationalize. "*There is a much better way for me to win friends and influence people. Perhaps if I go the route of soft sell... I can stay longer... and accomplish more...*" But instead... he boldly declared the gospel... and his experiences did not affect his approach.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

We are going to seek the answers to three questions from this text today; #1. Why is boldness so necessary? ... #2. Where can we obtain more boldness? ... and #3. ... What has to happen inside in order to be a bold person? ... My prayer for each and every one of us... is that we would have a sincere longing... to be an influence for Christ and his kingdom. ...And if this is the case... you know that you will need to live more boldly for Christ. ... But there is more to the answer of our first question – why is boldness necessary?

Simply put... boldness is necessary... because we don't want our lives to be lived in vain. ... We don't want to come to the end of our lives... or any chapter of it... with the sad conclusion... "*That was empty! Nothing of any consequence happened... There was no effect that mattered... It was all in vain.*" ... Dare I say that none of us... here... ever want to feel that... or say that... about any part of our life...? Our ministry efforts at church...? Our parenting...? Our career...? Our marriage...? Our social life...? ...

Boldness is necessary to keep that from happening... so that our lives are not in vain.

Please look with me again at verse 1 and 2...

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

You know what I find so amazing about these words of Paul...? Last week... as we saw in Acts 18... when Paul first came to Thessalonica... he was only able to stay and teach for THREE days... or three Sabbaths.

I would propose to you that Paul's life in Thessalonica had not been in vain... even though it was such a short stay... because he spoke the gospel with courage. ... Doesn't that make sense...? Without this courage... would he be able to see the results... that were not in vain...?

I think that a relatively safe conclusion that we can make... is that boldness is essential for making our lives count. It keeps us from feeling... "I lived in vain." ...Would you agree...?

But as bold as Paul was... his ministry was under constant attack as to its character. Many slanderous statements had been made by his enemies to try and discredit Paul's work and thus to keep people from being influenced by Paul's ministry. His time with them had not been in vain... and Paul wanted to keep it that way.

Although the details are not exactly known... it seems the accusations against Paul and his team-mates were threefold: (a) what they taught is full of error; (b) they are less than honest (full of guile, flattery, impure motives); (c) they are driven by personal greed.

They questioned his outward *motivations* by accusing him of being self-serving rather than serving for the good of the people (2:1-2). They challenged his inward *motives* by insinuating that he was out to please men and not God (2:3-4). They also indicted Paul's *methods* by charging that they were too authoritarian, rather than humble and gentle (2:5-7).

So what he is saying to these believers is... “Don't throw away **your** confidence when my opponents slander my ministry and my life. ... Remember the way it really was when I was there. ... I was not flattering and covetous. ... I was bold in God and risked my life to preach the gospel to you.... I worked night and day. ... I loved you like a nurse and like a father. ... The missionaries' boldness amid **strong opposition** was the sign of God at work in His servants and was proof of their genuineness. ... Paul remains bold as he confronts his attackers.

Let's move on now to our second question... Where can we find boldness? Where does it come from? ... Paul's answer is clear... You get it in God. Verse 2:

1 Thessalonians 2:2

His life was given up to God. ... His life was hidden in God (Colossians 3:3). ... He trusted God... all of his hope was in God... The glory of God was more attractive to Paul than any earthly comfort. Look what he wrote in Romans 8:18...

Romans 8:18 (ESV)

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

And once again in 2 Corinthians...

2 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

God was so real... and so powerful... and so wise... and so utterly committed to doing all for Paul's good... that he knew nothing could separate him from the love of God... not death... or life... or angels... or principalities... or things present... or things to come... or powers... or height... or depth... or anything else in all creation.

And so all his boldness was in God... and not in himself. And that has been the source of all the boldness of all the martyrs.

Perpetua was a Christian noblewoman who, in the year 202 A.D. lived with her husband, her son, and her slave, Felicitas, in Carthage (North Africa). At this time, North Africa was the center of a vibrant Christian community. It is no surprise, then, that when Emperor Septimius Severus determined to cripple Christianity (he believed it undermined Roman patriotism), he focused his attention on North Africa. Among the first to be arrested were five new Christians taking classes to prepare for baptism, one of whom was Perpetua.

Her father immediately came to her in prison. He was a pagan, and he saw an easy way for Perpetua to save herself. He entreated her simply to deny she was a Christian.

"Father do you see this vase here?" she replied. "Could it be called by any other name than what it is?"

"No," he replied.

"Well, neither can I be called anything other than what I am, a Christian."

In the next days, Perpetua was moved to a better part of the prison and allowed to breast-feed her child. With her hearing approaching, her father visited again, this time, pleading more passionately: "*Have pity on my gray head. Have pity on me, your father, if I deserve to be called your father, if I have favored you above all your brothers, if I have raised you to reach this prime of your life.*"

He threw himself down before her and kissed her hands. "*Do not abandon me to be the reproach of men. Think of your brothers; think of your mother and your aunt; think of your child, who will not be able to live once you are gone. Give up your pride!*"

Perpetua was touched but remained unshaken. She tried to comfort her father—"It will all happen in the prisoner's dock as God wills, for you may be sure that we are not left to ourselves but are all in his power"—but he walked out of the prison dejected.

The day of the hearing arrived, Perpetua and her friends were marched before the governor, Hilarianus. Perpetua's friends were questioned first, and each in turn admitted to being a Christian, and each in turn refused to make a sacrifice (an act of emperor worship). Then the governor turned to question Perpetua.

At that moment, her father, carrying Perpetua's son in his arms, burst into the room. He grabbed Perpetua and pleaded, "*Perform the sacrifice. Have pity on your baby!*"

Hilarius, probably wishing to avoid the unpleasantness of executing a mother who still nursed a child, added, "*Have pity on your father's gray head; have pity on your infant son. Offer the sacrifice for the welfare of the emperor.*"

Perpetua replied simply: "*I will not.*"

"*Are you a Christian then?*" asked the governor.

"*Yes I am,*" Perpetua replied.

Her father interrupted again, begging her to sacrifice, but Hilarius had heard enough: he ordered soldiers to beat him into silence. He then condemned Perpetua and her friends to die in the arena.

What produces Paul's... and Perpetua's kind of courage? ... We learn some more of the answer in Verse 4. That wonderful verse gives us two things that generates courage...

1 Thessalonians 2:3-4

First... he is intensely grateful for the sheer honor of proclaiming the gospel... the good news of Jesus Christ. ... Four times in our passage (in 2, 4, 8 and 9) he makes mention of the gospel of God. He gloried in the fact that God had called him to deliver a message that people desperately needed.

Have you ever... actually gloried... or relished... (seen it as the privilege that it is...) to be entrusted with life's most important answer... that anyone could ever ask...?

Why do people suffer heartbreak... loneliness... misery and agony of spirit day in and day out throughout their lives? ... It is because they do not know the truth about God. ... They do not know the delivering power of Jesus Christ. ... They do not know the inner warmth... strength... and encouragement... that can come from Christ living in them.

God has committed that message to Paul... and to every one of us... who are Christians... that we might share it with others. ... Do you recognize what an honor that is ? ! ...

We have to remind ourselves that we have been given the greatest honor that can ever be given to a human being... to proclaim "the unsearchable riches of Christ." ... Could there be anything greater than that? That is how Paul felt... and it generated such boldness.

Also... he says in verse 4... that he was energized by a desire to please God. ... Anyone who simply performs their Christian duty... in order to get something for themselves... will never be bold! But if you want to really please God... if that is a strong... impelling force within you... boldness will be there! ... Please ask yourself how much of what you do for Christ... has been to please God... and not man... or yourself.

We are now ready for the third question... what must happen in us... so that we can become bold...? We start with the answer to this with verse 5.

Perhaps the two greatest obstacles to boldness are the love of human acceptance and praise... and the love of the comforts and securities that we often think... money can buy. ... What has to happen inside of us... is for the power of these two loves... to be broken!

1 Thessalonians 2:5

So at least these two things have to happen inside if we are to be bold: we have to get free from the need of human acceptance and praise, and we have to get free from the need for the comforts and securities that money can buy. If we are free, we will be bold.

And the way to freedom is get your acceptance from God and get your praise from God, and to get your comforts and security from God. Verse 4 points to the key: "Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God."

Paul had his approval from God. He did not need human approval. He had his future in God. So no human threats could stop his courage.

Verses 7-12 give us a picture of what Paul's bold ministry looked like. ... he was gentle among them... he sacrificially worked day and night... he walked blameless among them... and he exhorted them like a father would.

... ..

We need boldness... because without it... our lives will be lived in vain. And our boldness comes from... #1. Our being in God... #2. Our right understanding about being entrusted with the Gospel... and #3. Our wanting to please God. ... Then... an inner transformation happens inside

of us. The power of our natural craving for human approval... is broken. The fear we may have of losing human security and comfort... is also broken.

Psy-ops stands for Psychological Operations, a form of warfare as old as the art of war itself. An early example of this can be found in the battle strategies of Alexander the Great. He gave orders to his armorers to construct oversized breastplates and helmets that would fit men 7 or 8 feet tall. If his army would ever need to retreat, his plan was to leave these items for the pursuing army to discover. When the enemy would find the oversized gear, they would be demoralized by the thought of fighting such giant soldiers, and they would abandon their pursuit. ... You have to admire such genius. (But let's not go too far with the admiration.)

Satan likes to play head games with us, too, often leaving us demoralized by fear or doubt. We assume Satan is bigger or greater than he really is. And the quickest way to thwart our Enemy's psy-ops is to gaze upon the greatness of our God. Perhaps all it takes is a quick look at Job 38:4–7:

Job 38:4-7 (ESV)

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”