

February 16, 2014

“Glory to God in the Church through Unafraid Witness”

2 Corinthians 2:14-17

But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing. To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume. And who is adequate for such a task as this?

You see, we are not like the many hucksters who preach for personal profit. We preach the word of God with sincerity and with Christ's authority, knowing that God is watching us.

Today we are going to talk about being a witness for Christ – sharing the Good News about Jesus and what He has done to purchase our salvation. It is the 3rd pillar that brings God's glory down in the church.

Let's review:

1st Pillar: Worship

When Jesus is fervently worshipped in spirit and truth it brings down His glory at church.

2nd Pillar: Preaching

Preaching the authority of God's Word without apology, in the power of the Holy Spirit, brings glory down in church.

3rd Pillar: Witnessing

Clear, direct witness to others about my own relationship with Jesus Christ brings the glory down.

Do you know that God has done more than give us good news He wants us to give out? He has also given us a manner for every method we use to get His word out.

Many years ago I met a young man who would go up to people, even randomly knock on doors and get in someone's face, ranting about how they need to be saved or they were going to hell. He even wore a t-shirt: on the front it said, “Turn” and on the back it said, “Or Burn!”

He thought he was being bold for Christ, but he wasn't; he was being obnoxious and rude for Christ.

Yet, the key word that may best describe the way God wants His gospel given is **boldness**. The Greek word is, **par-rhe-si-a** (par-rhay-see`-ah). It is translated in the NT as: “openly,” “freely,” “plainly,” “with confidence” but most commonly some form of the word “bold.”

A bold witness is someone who openly, freely, plainly, with confidence shares their relationship with Jesus and what they know about Him. What a bold witness is not is pushy, they are do not have to be loud or obnoxious. A bold witness is not rude or demanding. Boldness is clear, direct communication in the face of potential opposition, nothing more and nothing less.

The book of Acts not only tells a story of the apostles and other believers sharing the good news about salvation in Jesus, it not only mentions the methods they used, but also this matter of boldness as the manner that accompanied their sharing. Let's look at some Scriptures from Acts:

Acts 2:29 NIV Peter says,
"Brothers, I can tell you confidently (*par-rhe-si-a*)..." (same word translated "bold")

Peter witnessed or proclaimed Christ, speaking freely and with confidence; and why not, for he had become convinced that Jesus is the only hope for all humanity.

In Acts 4 we see another example of the Message of Jesus shared with boldness. The religious leaders were (v2) "very disturbed" thoroughly annoyed and upset at the apostles for "teaching the people" about Jesus, and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead (v2). So they arrested Peter and John and threw them in prison over night (v3). But (v4) by their bold teaching many believed and the number of believers in Jesus grew to over 5,000 people.

The next day the leaders called for Peter and John to be brought before them. And they questioned them (v7), "By what power, or in whose name (or by what authority), have you done this?"

Then (v8) Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, with confidence speaks boldly to the very leaders that put him in prison and can do it again and he says (v10) Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that we speak and heal by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. Talk about boldness and speaking plainly, he holds them responsible for the Messiah's crucifixion, still proclaiming that He was raised from the dead. Then with continued boldness Peter concludes by proclaiming that forgiveness of sin and eternal salvation is in this Jesus and in Him only (v12), "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."

Just weeks before Peter was fearful of the words of a servant girl, denying he even knew Jesus, but now having experienced being with the risen Jesus, receiving and being controlled by the Holy Spirit, he is not silent before the ruling council. And how do they respond? (v13) The members of the council were amazed when they saw the (*par-rhe-si-a*) boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus.

At this point the religious leaders order Peter and John out of the council so they can confer privately. (v16) They ask, "What should we do with these men?" and conclude (v17) "we must warn them not to speak to anyone in Jesus' name again." So (v18) they called the apostles back in and commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Good luck with that – that's just not going to happen and Peter and John let them know it's not going to happen as they left them with just one question (v19): "Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? In other words what you're asking is impossible for..." "We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard." Now, that is boldness. I simply cannot stop speaking about what Jesus has done for me. And I want to obey God when He is leading me to speak.

(v21) The council then threatened them further, but they finally let them go.

(v23-24) Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God

When the believers heard about the threats did they say we better lay low for a while? Did they call a meeting to talk about a new strategy? No, they prayed. What did they pray about? Did they pray for protection from the threats of the religious bullies? Did they pray against any further arrests and prison? Did they pray for a new facility to house the growing congregation? No, they asked the Lord (v29), "give us, your servants, great (*par-rhe-si-a*) boldness in preaching your word." And after this prayer (v31) the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

Wow, what happened? God's glory came down and He powerfully answered that prayer for they were determined not to be silenced about Jesus no matter the treat. And yet, how easily the treat of just a negative response silences our witness today.

Why does God want our boldness?

The thing that was going to be a barrier to the apostles and other believers witnessing for Christ was not the threats of the religious leaders, it would be their lack of boldness.

Evangelism happens naturally and easily as a by-product of a church focused on the glory of God. Salvation is not a work we do, it is a work only God can do. So why is He not doing it more through you? The question is not how can we be more effective in working for God, but, how can we remove the barriers that prevent God from doing what we know He desires? If instead of boldness you are fearful about being a witness because you might upset someone, or they may get angry with you, or not like you than you are forgetting the words to our text today:

(God) uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing. To those who

are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume. And who is adequate for such a task as this? You see, we are not like the many hucksters who preach for personal profit. We preach the word of God with sincerity and with Christ's authority, knowing that God is watching us.

God uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ unless we are blocking Him from using us. If so we want to remove those barriers. The main barrier is a lack of boldness something we should pray for. Remember what being bold means, its openly, and freely, plainly and confidently stating what Christ has done for you. We realize that to some we stink, that's unavoidable.

The message of Christ (that He died to pay the penalty for our sin, and thus forgive us that we might be saved from judgment and hell and given eternal life) is bad news to some (a dreadful smell of death and doom). And it is good news to some (life –giving perfume). Those who are being drawn by the Spirit immediately recognize the life-giving power of the message. Those who stubbornly refuse to believe, however, smell something foul — the judgment of death that awaits them (notice that Paul painted a stark contrast. There is no middle ground). Well this stinks to some, so to them we stink, it's unavoidable. So Paul says, And who is adequate for such a task as this? In other words we rely on God's power instead of our own competence. We must focus on what Jesus can do through us, not what we can do for Him. This will make us bold.

But look what happens because we know people get upset with the message. Either in fear that you may upset someone and you don't want someone to not like you: in an effort to not upset anyone, so will stay silent, or replace boldness with blandness and cease to be a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. The other approach to people not liking the message is to become "hucksters" – an aggressive salesperson, like the guy with the "turn or burn" t-shirt. God doesn't want us to sell Jesus instead...

We preach the word of God with sincerity and with Christ's authority, knowing that God is watching us.

God wants boldness because it's the only manner of speaking about Jesus that comes from the overflow of our love for Him. A bold witness speaks out of personal experience, so it is unafraid. Unafraid of how others will view us, unafraid if people reject us, unafraid of all but God who is with us and gives us boldness when we remove the barriers to receiving boldness from Him.

Hold to the simplicity of the gospel without hurrying the decision or hiding the cost. The gospel costs a person everything. We choose to follow Christ, He is the chairman of the board of our life. It is not an easy decision. When we are surrendered fully to Him He becomes the true messenger, we are the vessels He uses and that free us to share the gospel with boldness.

Let me close with this, Jesus said,

John 4:35

You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest.

In other words, stop saying the harvest is months away; it's today. There are people all around you everywhere, every day who are ripe to hear about Jesus. What makes a person ripe? When a person realizes that the circumstances or conditions of their life are beyond their ability to solve they are ripe. When a person is thinking that there has to be more to life than what they are experiencing, they are ripe. When people are outcasts, not accepted and hurting they are ripe. It's not the healthy that need a doctor, it's the sick who know their need (Matt. 9:12). And you will know because God is already preparing, moving on hearts to ripen them. No one can come to Christ unless the Father draws them (John 6:44). Lift up your eyes and look, the fields are ripe.

We want our church to be a place where God's glory comes down so the worshippers go out determined to see others discover what they have found.

Matthew 9:37-38

"The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields."

Pray for more workers, pray to be a worker, pray for boldness. Pray! That is what we are going to talk about next week, prayer. We kept it for last, not because it is least important, but because it is the most important thing we do.