

Several years ago... pastor and author - Leith Anderson was the keynote speaker at the annual conference for our association of churches. He tells a story of when he and others were travelling to a communist country... where Christians are regularly persecuted. ... They did not have a direct flight into the country of their destination... so they had to stay in a neighboring country for one evening.

That night while they were having dinner with some fellow believers in the neighboring 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 (however) would not take “no” for an answer. They told Anderson and his group that they would return in the morning with some Bibles... and that Anderson’s group should “*ask God what they should do...*”

Over the course of the night... Anderson had more thought on the matter. “*A Bible or two would be risky – but not impossible.*” However... he was (in no way) prepared for the following morning’s delivery. ... It was a small library of Bible... books about Christianity... study tools... and videos. “*I truly can’t explain why we did – what we did...*” he recalls. ... We divided up the mini-library among the four of us... which consumed every available space in our luggage... carry-on bags... and purses.

It was not a comfortable experience. ... When nearing our destination... the flight attendants distributed custom forms on which we were to write our names... passport numbers... and then answer several very pointed

questions. Were we bringing guns... narcotics... or **literature** into the country...? Uh-oh!

The four of us sat paralyzed... not knowing what we should write. ... If we said that we were NOT bringing literature into the country... we were lying. ... If we checked the “yes” box and answered the subsequent required “what?” ... we would be in serious trouble.

It was one of those moments when the Holy Spirit gave a simple solution that we could not have thought of 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 then all four of us were waved on through!**

Leith Anderson concludes that when they turned over the books, Bibles, literature, and videos to the underground church – the look on their faces will remain with him *the rest of his life*. ... [P A U S E] ...

Ministry and courage! They go hand-in-hand. Our passage today (in 1st Thessalonians) will suggest that you cannot have ministry without courage.

Do you (personally) have *enough* courage in your Christian life...? ... Have you ever wished that you were more **bold** in your stand for Christ...? Have you ever been convicted into *praying* and asking God to make you more bold...? ... Perhaps you caught yourself hesitating (or remaining completely silent) in a conversation with a non-believer... even though the discussion seemed to *beg* for the spiritual answers that you possess? ... Or perhaps you have been aware of a brother or sister in Christ who needs to

be confronted with a sin in their life... because it is hurting their relationship with Christ – but you have been looking the other way.

Our passage is going to reveal (at least) two things to us. It will (*not only*) tell us HOW we can become more bold... but it will also tell us something we (*perhaps*) think we already know – but we may **not**. ... We may not fully know what the boldness we have been asking God for – looks like. ... Have you ever thought that - sometimes it is “gentle” like a mother nursing her child...? (We will see this irony in verse 7 of our passage today.)

If I were to ask you to conjure-up in your minds... an example from your Christian experience... of someone who was a “bold Christian”... it may not depict a proper image. The person you think of... might (indeed) be someone who seems to have no fear in declaring God’s truth to others... but the longer you are around them... you notice that they also seem to be a bit calloused. They are unable to empathize with the feelings of others. They can declare God’s truth powerfully... but when they lead people to Christ... they don’t stick around and nurture them in the faith. In fact our examples of Bold Christians (very often)... don’t make good nurturing parents... and their children often rebel.

Bold Christians sure seem to get things done around the church. ... And boy do they ever know it! It becomes a primary motivation to see all that they can accomplish. So they aren’t afraid to challenge people to participate in ministry with them... and to carry some heavy weight... They have so many projects going on – all at once. But (in getting things done) they not only “*take the bull by the horns*” – they **become the bull** – as in a china shop!” People (who they used)... lay strewn everywhere. Sidelined Christians are wondering why they involved themselves – and they are also

wondering about the motives of the bold person who enlisted them.

... [P A U S E] ...

There is “holy boldness”... and there is “unholy boldness”... and we need to understand the *difference*. It is essential that we understand what it is we are asking God to give to us... when we ask Him for proper boldness.

As we open the second chapter of 1st Thessalonians today... please remember that the church at Thessalonica was under heavy persecution. The Jewish religionists had risen up against Paul and the church... and were set on destroying both. ... They enlisted all the Gentile citizens they could... to join their attack. ... They convinced the people that the preaching of Christ would destroy their freedom... and affect their jobs and businesses. ... The persecution became so violent that Paul was forced to flee for his life.

However... his absence did not stop the persecution. The attacks against the church and its believers continued. One form which the persecution took... was to destroy the reputation of Paul. Accusation after accusation was leveled against Paul... and rumor after rumor was spread about him.

His enemies said that he was more concerned to make money out of his converts... than to present true teaching. They presented Paul as having an UNholy boldness. ... The accusations would be made easier because the 1st Century had so many itinerant preachers. These had an UNholy boldness (concerned only to feather their own nests.) The apostle was being represented as nothing more than another one (of this class of vagrant preachers.) So Paul writes to show the obvious difference

between ***his holy*** boldness... and the **UN**holy boldness of itinerant preachers.

1 Thes 2:1

Thinking back, they would recall that Paul's visit was not in vain. Vain means "empty." But Paul's ministry was not empty; it wasn't a failure. It had good results. It changed people. His ministry made bad people - good people. False ministers were a different story. (You see) an UNholy boldness only fleeces people; it does not make bad people into good people.

1 Thes 2:2

Before reaching Thessalonica... Paul had suffered both injury and insult in Philippi. ... He and Silas had been stripped... beaten... thrown into prison... and their feet fastened in the stocks. ... It had not only been an extremely painful experience... but humiliating as well... since they were flogged naked in public... without trial... and in spite of their Roman citizenship.

Chuck Swindoll writes:

Paul and Silas hadn't come to Thessalonica on a float or in a ticker tape parade. No welcome wagon greeted them, no dignitaries from the city council cared to usher in God's ambassadors of salvation. Rather, they had come in a lowly—perhaps even mangled—condition from Philippi, where they had been severely mistreated. Despite the fact that they were Roman citizens, Paul and Silas had been publicly stripped, flogged, and thrown into prison without a trial (Acts 16:19-24). Yet even amidst this terrible opposition, they pressed on through the hardship and preached boldly in Thessalonica.

Instead of pressing on to Thessalonica from Philippi, Paul and Silas could have turned around and headed to port, setting sail back to

Antioch with their scars of defeat still throbbing. They could have felt disqualified or at least unqualified by the rejection they had received from the Romans and city officials in Philippi prior to heading to Thessalonica.

Most of us would have taken a vacation or found an excuse not to minister. Or if we would minister... our boldness would have been so affected that we would (now) try not to upset anyone. Instead of being bold... we would walk on eggshells. ... That is what an UNholy boldness would do. But Paul and Silas had a different kind of boldness.

Where did they get it...? Were they simply born with it...? ... Some will say that Paul was courageous by nature... that he would take on anything... or anyone. ... But I would like to show you that this is **not true**. He was a lot like you and me! Look what he (later) wrote about his time in Corinth – and maybe you should know that Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians while he was in Corinth. (In other words what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 2:3 - was Paul's condition... as he wrote the very verses we are studying today!

1 Corinthians 2:3 (ESV)

³ *And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,*

Paul admits that being in Corinth intimidated him. So... “no!”... he did not have a natural courage. He had to obtain it. (And I don't know about you... but this reassures me.) What Paul had... is not something that you are either born with... or you're not. ... Of course some people are born with a personality that tends to be more bold and risk-taking. ... We can find UNholy boldness everywhere – and much of that is probably tied to people's personality. But Paul obtained the much **less** common – “holy boldness.”

Only **God** can give us this kind of boldness. Only God can turn Paul and Silas' pain... suffering... and set-backs (in Philippi) into a holy boldness. And then God makes it persistent.

They continued to face persecution when they came to Thessalonica. The end of verse two mentions that there (too) they "*declared the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.*" The word "conflict" - αγων (from which we get the word "agony") is a vivid one. ... It is taken from the world of athletics... where it meant a contest or a race. ... It denotes (not a token opposition... not a tepid struggle)... but a very **real** battle. ... The use of the word here reminds the Thessalonians that the opposition that Paul had met had been **intense**... and his preaching had not been easy.

How (in the face of this) could it be said that Paul preached only for what he could get out of it? (That he had an UNholy boldness...?)

1 Thes 2:3

The methods that are so well-used by our politicians... have no part in holy boldness. ... It does not use cunning... deceit... deviousness... or trickery to win converts... and do the work of ministry.

The word translated "deceive" carries the idea of "baiting a hook." In other words... Paul did not trap people into being saved... the way a clever salesman traps people into buying his product. ... Spiritual witnessing and "Christian salesmanship" are different. ... True ministry (whether it is witnessing to someone who is lost... or if it is serving on a church committee)... does not depend on a clever argument... or a subtle presentation. ... Holy boldness will rely on prayer... God's Word... and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Holy boldness is transparent. It is truthful... honest... upright... and noble. ... If you are willing to take a risk in ministry that involves questionable actions – **that** (my friend) is not holy boldness. Holy boldness never says “*the end justifies the means.*” ... [P A U S E] ...

OK... so how can we obtain “holy boldness”? ... Two concepts are given to us in verse 4... that are absolutely foundational to our attaining it.

1 Thes 2:4

The word translated “approved” (δοκιμαζω / dokimazō) basically means “to test”... “to approve by test.” ... God chooses His messengers – and He tests them before committing the gospel to their trust. The first concept (here in verse 4) about how we obtain holy boldness... is that we obtain holy boldness... as we are forged by fire! ... Enduring hardships for the cause of Christ is how we obtain it. ... Paul and Silas’ treatment in Philippi was giving them a holy boldness. ... You may be facing such a trial right now... as God develops a holy boldness in you.

There is a song currently on Contemporary Christian radio by Hillsong United that ministers deeply to me. ... The chorus repeats these words over and over:

*“There was another in the fire, standing next to me
There was another in the waters, holding back the sea”*

Finally... the song resolves with this chorus:

*There’ll be another in the fire, standing next to me.
There’ll be another in the waters, holding back the sea.
And should I ever need reminding how good You’ve been to me
I’ll count the joy, come every battle
Cause I know **that’s where You’ll be.**”*

Enduring hardship – knowing Christ is right there with us... develops holy boldness!

Second... we obtain holy boldness by having a certain/settled **conviction**. (Now... this has to be **more** than a truth we *accept*. It has to be an intense... deep-seated confidence.) ...It must be our fervent belief... and it is this: "**We have been ENTRUSTED with the gospel!**" ... It is **not** OK to simply bury it inside our lives.

Matthew 25:14-30

Four times in our passage of study today in Thessalonians... Paul makes mention of the Gospel of God (verses 2,4,8, and 9.) He is intensely grateful for the sheer honor of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. He gloried in the fact that God had called him to deliver His message to a dying world.

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

Why are there so many hurting people in the world? Why do so many suffer heartbreak... loneliness... misery... and agony of spirit – every day of their lives...? **Is it NOT** because they do not know what God has done for them...? Is it NOT because they do not know the delivering power of Jesus Christ...?

God has committed that message to Paul... and to every one of us (who call themselves followers of Christ.) - Do we have the deep-seated conviction of what an honor this is...? ... Every day... we should pray for an ever-deepening conviction that we have been given the greatest honor

that could ever be given to a human being. ... Could there be anything more significant than proclaiming the unsearchable riches in Christ...? THIS must be what generated such boldness in Paul.

How do we obtain a holy boldness? ... #1. We must endure hardship for Christ. ... #2. We must come to fervently believe that we have been **ENTRUSTED** with the Gospel of God. ... and then the natural result of having this holy boldness... is that we will care MORE about what God thinks... than we do what men think.

It isn't that holy boldness doesn't CARE what men think. Holy boldness does not esteem them of no value... and it is not indifferent whether they are pleased or displeased... But other people being pleased (or not)... is not the goal. Holy boldness will declare truth to obtain the approval of God – whatever men might think of it.

1 Thes 2:5

Flattery can be observed by others. But a motive (such as greed) –only **God** sees! ...So Paul calls on the Thessalonians as witnesses on the subject of flattery... and he calls on **God**... as witness about his motives.

We use flattery when we insincerely tell people pleasurable things about themselves. The word that Paul used here... refers to using insincere words... with the hope that the person so manipulated... will do what is wanted of him.

Sometimes people say they are simply complimenting but it is more than complimenting - it is flattery. ... Flattery softens up people to make them victims. ... Flattery causes people to drop their guard and become

vulnerable to the desires of the flatterer. ... It's *disgusting* to hear a person butter-up someone. Flattery is phony... and it covers up a person's real intentions. ... Christians should not be flatterers. Flattery is resorted to wherever holy boldness is lacking!

1 Thes 2:6

If we have holy boldness... the love of applause diminishes significantly. So does personal ambition... setting up a dominion... ascendancy... or ranking system... attempting to secure uncommon advantages.

No gift compared with the gift of the apostle. ... (Furthermore)... no apostle compares with Paul. ... To be an apostle was an *honor* (indeed.) There have been only a few such men. Their names will be eternally immortalized in the foundation of stones of the New Jerusalem (according to Rev. 21:14).

No secular office can compare with this high and holy calling. No king, president, Caesar, emperor, church dignitary, conquering general, artist, scientist, engineer, no political pundit, or business tycoon will ever hold the same status such as “the apostles of Christ” held. They were unique (a chosen handful.) They had gifts and a calling that set them apart from all others. They were the aristocracy of heaven... the Lord’s own chosen special messengers.

If any man *could have* glorified in his apostleship... it was Paul. ... But Paul said,

Galatians 6:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

If a believer has to assert their authority... or tries to secure any uncommon advantages over others... they are not using a holy boldness.

... [P A U S E] ...

Now we come to the *irony* of a holy boldness that I mentioned at the beginning of this message.

1 Thes 2:7

We don't often think of boldness as having a gentle side... do we...? But with Paul's metaphor that uses a mother... you tell *me* if boldness and gentleness are *not* opposites.

Here is what a mother does: besides making sacrifices... having patience... and giving nourishment... a mother also *protects* her child. Each of these involve risk! ... (For example) a willingness to make sacrifices takes a bold belief that it will all work-out in not having what was sacrificed. ... And it almost goes without saying that *protecting* involves boldness.

You may be familiar with an often-told illustration about a missionary in Africa... who... years ago... was walking down a forest path where a fire had blazed. ... He saw beside the pathway the charred remains of a nest and a mother hen. ... He nudged aside the carcass. To his astonishment... out from beneath the burned fragments ran some baby chicks. ... Mother love had that hen give her life for her brood. ... Yes... Boldness has a gentle side.

Holy boldness does not need to be harsh! ... Calloused...? Insensitive to other people's feelings...? No! ... And it *can* be very affectionate.

1 Thes 2:8

The missionary story about momma hen... was exactly how Paul was toward his babes in Christ. He would have given his life for them. ... Holy boldness is essentially self-giving. ... It is not a desire to possess the beloved... but a desire to give.

1 Thes 2:9

Paul and his companions had worked... and had worked hard... to support themselves and to ensure that no burden was placed on their converts. ... The missionaries had been working by night and by day ... and had been preaching besides! ... It must have been very hard (indeed) to find time for all this... and not to break down under the load. ... Yet... for the sake of the gospel of God and out of love for the Thessalonians... the burden had been gladly borne. ... [P A U S E] ...

Our final understanding about holy boldness is that it doesn't back down from the hard work of training... instructing... and disciplining. ... Paul has compared himself to the Thessalonians as a mother caring for babies in the faith. ... But in the ancient world it was the father who was responsible for the education of the child... so the change in imagery is appropriate.

1 Thes 2:10-12

Here is another example of the gentle side of holy boldness. Verse 12 mentions that he exhorted them. The word he used for "exhort" means to call aside. So (once again) we see that this boldness is not insensitive to other people's feelings. It isn't brash and unthoughtful of others – even when they need **correcting**.

The picture is that Paul would call various ones *to his side*. After asking a few penetrating questions... he would know what stage his companion was in their spiritual life. ... He would build on that. ... He would impart doctrine... to develop Christian character... to teach the principles of new life in Christ... and to encourage submission to the will of God – tailored specifically to the individual. ... A conscientious father will take his children aside to encourage them... instruct them... console them... and point out to them the good and right way.

All of Paul's encouraging and comforting and urging were directed toward seeing the Thessalonians "*walk in a manner worthy of God.*" ... "Walking" is for Paul a favorite way of designating the whole of one's life.

Does your life need - holy boldness?

My challenge for you this week is to ask God for it. We are going to need it for the times that are coming. It is a big reason why the church at Thessalonica held up under their persecution.

How do we obtain a holy boldness? ... #1. We must endure hardship for Christ. ... And remember He will be (there) in the fire with us... He will be in the water... holding back the sea. ... #2. We must come to fervently believe that we have been **ENTRUSTED** with the Gospel of God. Ask God to impress on your heart what a privilege we have!