

Bold Preaching
1 Thessalonians 2:1—4

This passage of Scripture gives us insight into how Paul was able to share the gospel message with the Thessalonians. We can see the great love Paul had for them and how they reciprocated that love. When he preached boldly they responded by quickly giving up their idols to serve a living God.

Verse 2

Paul considered his trip to Thessalonica very worthwhile. Having been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, Paul and Silas move further into Macedonia, a province just north of present-day Greece. He was able to preach and teach in the synagogue for only three weeks before being forced out by evil unbelieving Jews (Acts 17:1—10). During this short time, in spite of much opposition, Paul was able to speak boldly concerning Christ. Paul was emboldened to preach the gospel after being persecuted just as Peter, James and John were in early Acts who counted it a privilege to be mistreated for Christ's sake (Acts 5:40—42). Paul had suffered greatly as an apostle of God (Acts 9:16; 2 Corinthians 11:22—27) but yet thought of his suffering as minor when compared to the glory that is to come (Romans 8:18; Colossians 3:4; Titus 2:13).

It's interesting to see how Paul handled preaching the Gospel. He didn't shy away from proclaiming the Mystery message revealed to him by Jesus Christ, however, he was gentle. Some people interpret gentle as becoming a doormat, hiding your true message so as not to offend. In 2 Timothy 2:25 Paul gives Timothy the instruction to be gentle. This passage is about correcting those who oppose us. We are to stand firm in what we believe but never told to hide what we believe. When someone speaks out against our doctrine we are to correct him or her gently. Read Matthew 23 to see how Jesus handled the religious leaders who were speaking out against Him. When they continued to oppose Him, twisting His words and preaching a doctrine that sent people to hell, Jesus spoke out to warn the people not to listen to their teaching. Jesus was bold in His teaching even to the point of offending many however, He dealt many times with the religious leaders before this with gentleness. His condemnation at this point came when it was obvious that they were not going to change and they were leading people to hell by their teachings.

John the Baptist also seems to throw gentleness out the window when he told the religious leaders they were nothing more than a brood of vipers (Matthew 3:7). Again, like Jesus, he boldly preached the Kingdom doctrine while standing firm against those who were antagonists. When it comes down to choosing to proclaim doctrinal truth or be silenced, they chose doctrine (see Acts 5:27—31).

Paul was also bold in his teaching, never compromising his message. His boldness and lack of compromise landed him in jail numerous times along with being beaten, stoned and other mistreatment. He riled up his detractors many times because he could not compromise the Mystery doctrine given to him by Jesus Christ.

Compromising doctrine

Here's where many of today's churches go wrong. They emphasize unity over doctrine desiring not to offend anybody. The process of delivering the message becomes more important than the actual doctrine. These churches change or hide who they really are in an attempt to attract the broadest segment of attendees. One church I previously attended had to search and search before coming up with their Statement of Faith. It became obvious that this declaration of their doctrinal beliefs was not actually adhered to because they allowed me to join the church without being baptized (baptism was supposedly required). Their desire to grow the church superseded the desire to hold to their stated doctrine. (Hindsight leads me to wonder why I even joined such a church.)

Another church I know has a great Statement of Faith but has sanitized it publically by eliminating the more controversial points. Instead of posting it in its entirety boldly and proudly on their website, (as many fundamental churches do) they shrink back hoping not to offend possible future attendees. Anyone desiring the uncensored Statement of Faith needs to call the church to request a copy. Again, this church is as wrong as the above church in that they emphasize numerical growth over doctrine.

Paul's handling of doctrine

We can get a good idea of the importance Paul placed on the doctrine he taught by looking at the two books written to Timothy. Here, Paul gives young Pastor Timothy the information and encouragement he needed to lead his congregation. Timothy had to learn to deal with false doctrines, specious arguments and harmful distractions. According to 1 Timothy 6:3 Timothy is to hold the Mystery doctrine above all else. Those who oppose him are considered utterly unintelligent about the truth only desiring to stir up controversies leading to strife within the church assembly.

One portion of Scripture that is very often mistranslated and therefore misunderstood is found in 2 Timothy 1:12. Most understand this verse to be speaking of Paul's salvation; that God gave him his salvation and He will guard that salvation until Paul is taken to heaven. However, the context does not allow this interpretation. In the previous verse Paul says he has suffered for being a preacher and teacher to the Gentiles but he is not ashamed. The verse following instructs Timothy to hold fast the form of sound words which he heard from Paul. If the verse in the middle is continuing the thought of preaching and maintaining sound doctrine then verse 12 would be about the Mystery doctrine being entrusted to Paul and protected by God so that it will not return void (Isaiah 55:11). Here is a literal translation:

1 Timothy 1:12 But I am not ashamed, for I know in whom I have trusted and I am fully convinced that He is able to guard my deposit until that day. (Mounce)

I believe this interpretation is supported by 1 Timothy 6:20 when Paul tells Timothy to guard what has been entrusted to him. This same instruction is also given in 2 Timothy 1:14. In other words, God entrusted Paul with the this new Mystery doctrine, he then passed it on to Timothy with the admonition to carefully guard and preserve this teaching. Finally Timothy is told to pass these teachings on to faithful men who in turn will be able to pass it on to others (2 Timothy 2:1).

Bold but gentle

As can be seen with the above examples, doctrine should never be compromised in any form. Those preaching the teachings of the Kingdom would do so even under much duress. Obviously, Paul followed this same example in his dissemination of the Mystery doctrine. All preached with unwavering boldness yet did so in a gentle manner. Those who hindered the dissemination of their message were chastised and condemned because their actions would have affected the message going out to those who needed to hear it.

I believe we need to follow these examples. We should never compromise with the doctrine Paul has given to us through Jesus Christ. The instruction from Paul could be boiled down to this. Be bold, not worrying about how others will receive it but do so in a spirit of gentleness with the realization that it is the Holy Spirit who is at work convincing and convicting people as to the truth of mid-Acts teaching.

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