

# 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6

Intro May 13, 2007 Confident in God

Bob had finally made it to the last round of the \$1 Million Question. The night before the big question, he told the host MC that he desired a question on American History, a subject in which he was confident. The big night arrived. Bob made his way onstage in front of the studio audience. He had become the talk of the week. He was the best guest this show had ever seen. The MC stepped up to the mike.

"Bob, you have chosen American History as your final question. You know that if you correctly answer this question, you will walk away \$1 million dollars richer. Are you ready?"

Bob nodded with cocky confidence. The crowd went nuts. He hadn't missed a question all week.

"Bob, yours is a two-part question. As you know, you may answer either part first. As a rule, the second half of the question is always easier. Which part would you like to take a stab at first?"

Bob became noticeably nervous. He couldn't believe it, but he was not sure, but American History was his easiest subject. His confidence waned. He decided to play it safe. "I'll try the easier part first."

The MC nodded approvingly. "Here we go Bob. I will ask you the second half first, then the first half." The audience grew silent with anticipation...

"Bob, here is your question: And in what year did it happen?"

Sometimes our confidence is shattered, we question ourselves, wonder if we are as capable and competent as we would otherwise have thought. We don't know what we thought we once knew.

Your self confidence may have gone through a readjustment recently. It may be just around the bend. The health you once had is shaken as you are more winded going up the stairs. The job that was so secure is in question. You thought you knew how to raise kids until you had your own. If you have not had your confidence shaken at least a little just recently, you can tune out what I am about to say. But remember, there is a mighty thin line between confidence and cluelessness.

Our passage this morning deals with confidence, but a confidence that resides not in ourselves, but in a God who makes us confident. Paul is writing to a church he established and was then forced to leave due to outside pressures. He is thankful for their progress as Christians, recognizing that the changes which have taken place in them should give them confidence, for the changes are not due to their self effort, but God's grace at work in them.

This confidence reflects the confidence Paul and Silas have as missionaries, a confidence which we need today as well. This confidence has been entrusted to us by God.

READ 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6. We are to be confident because God entrusts us.

The confidence in this passage is in v2 where Paul speaks of their boldness.

Boldness denotes the state of mind when words flow freely, the attitude of feeling at home with no sense of stress or strain. It is the opposite of flattery, mentioned in v5. This is the freedom to be unrestrained in speech, to have all filters removed and conceal nothing of what is thought.

For many of us this is dangerous, for it is filters that keep us being socially acceptable and invited back to friend's houses. But when we are well attuned to what God desires, when we know we are entrusted by God to speak not just what is on our mind, but what is on his mind, we are bold, confident in what we say.

Confidence avoids what Paul mentions in v1 – vanity. Confidence 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--our jobs, our ministries, our families--and say, "Its empty. Nothing happened. There was no effect that mattered. It was all in vain." We don't want to feel that or say that. And so boldness is necessary to keep that from happening--so that our lives are not in vain.

## **WE SHOULD BE CONFIDENT BECAUSE GOD ENTRUSTS US WITH SUFFERING** 1-2

How can we have confidence in the face of suffering?

It is in suffering and conflict that confidence most often is shattered. But notice what Paul says here – they had boldness to declare the gospel in much conflict

The word rendered *conflict* was often used in athletic games. Such conflict involves intense exertion and strenuous, persistent effort to overcome the odds. Paul sees suffering not as something to be avoided, but a contest in which we are put to the test. Paul's suffering would have shattered the confidence of another. What was the conflict which Paul refers to here?

Acts 16 tells us how Paul, in Philippi, was publicly dragged into the market of the city and charged with sedition because he cast the demon out of a girl and spent the night in jail.

Not too bad, but then if you read the rest of the story, you know the suffering was worse. He was flogged, a punishment reserved for slaves and Roman non-citizens. Its intent was to inflict tremendous pain, not only for the moment on the back, but the pain of public humiliation and a lifetime of scars which would tell others of your crime and status. For that reason Paul adds to *suffered* that they were *shamefully mistreated*.

In light of humiliating abuse, Paul shows up at Thessalonica, his wounds still tender. He does not say: *Having been ill-treated at Philippi, we were more circumspect in Thessalonica*

Rather he has confidence to face abuse all over again. Suffering does not eradicate his confidence, but he knows he has been entrusted by God to suffer and that his confidence is not found in his circumstances, but in the God and His gospel which he must declare.

Paul is not the only example of confidence in the face of suffering.

The Scots Covenanter Hugh Mackail was a Presbyterian in Scotland in a bloody decade of the 1660's when being a Presbyterian was viewed as seditious. (How times have changed). He was tortured with what they called the boot to force him to reveal other members of his band. His leg was inserted into an iron case and then a wedge of iron was inserted between his knee and the case snugly. When he refused to answer, the executioner struck the wedge with a mallet. Eleven times the mallet was struck until Mackail's leg was shattered.

He said, "I protest solemnly in the sight of God, I can say no more, though all the joints in my body were in as great anguish as my leg." The leg would not be much use to him anyway. He was sentenced to be executed. His final words were famous and became the cry of confidence of some of the later martyrs.

Now I leave off to speak any more to creatures, and turn my speech to Thee, O Lord. Now I begin my intercourse with God, which shall never be broken off. Farewell, father and mother, friends and relations! Farewell, the world and all delights! Farewell, meat and drink! Farewell, sun, moon, and stars! Welcome, God and Father! Welcome, sweet Lord Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant! Welcome, blessed Spirit of grace, God of all consolation! Welcome, glory! Welcome, eternal life! Welcome, death!<sup>1</sup>

What confidence do we have when faced with suffering?

When family members disapprove of your religious convictions, do you find yourself shrinking from a loving response. Do you seek to be so inoffensive to others that you tailor the good news of Christ to be nothing more than a bland retort that God loves them?

God will at times entrust us with suffering, but that pain should never cause us to cower, but be confident that God works through our pain to promote his glory. Your suffering may not be the magistrate's rod but it may be the coworker's scorn, the neighbor's cold shoulder. Rather than retreating when times are tough, know that your confidence is to be found in the God whose Son suffered for you.

## **WE SHOULD BE CONFIDENT BECAUSE GOD ENTRUSTS US WITH PURITY**

3-4

But Paul is not so prideful to claim purity as his own, but his appeal, the gospel, is what is pure. But since Paul's confidence is based not on his own track record nor on his own heart's condition, but on God's good news, Paul can speak confidently of the purity of the gospel. In light of that, we too can say ...

### **We have a pure message**

What we call people to comes not from error. This word in Greek describes a going astray, a roaming or wandering. We are not on some spiritual quest in hopes of discovering truth. The gospel is a pure message given to us from God. We must have confidence in that.

Thessalonica sat on the Egnatian Way, the famous highway that went east to west through Macedonia. Thessalonica was also an important port and a melting pot city with cultures from all over the world. There were a staggering variety of religions and religious professionals in Thessalonica. In this city, you would find the worship of the gods of the Olympian pantheon: Apollo, Athena and Hercules. There were the native Greek mystery religions, celebrating Dionysus and the sex and drinking cult. The Greek intellectual and philosophical traditions were also represented. There were shrines to many Egyptian gods: Isis, Sarapis, Anubis. Also present were the Roman State cults that deified the political heroes of Rome.

In that day as well as in ours, we are told not to be overly confident in what we believe for we all have competing claims to truth. But rather than seeing the gospel as but one among many claims to what is truth and not error, we need to realize that our confidence in the gospel comes out of a confidence in God, not in ourselves. That we are not engaging in error is solely based on the fact that our appeal comes from God. Our confidence comes not from ourselves. When we seek self confidence all we will get is burned.

At a self-help seminar in Rohrbach, Austria, participants were to walk over hot, fiery coals. The purpose of the exercise was to "mobilize their energy reserves." The course motto was, "If you can walk over hot coals, you can do anything." The participants faced a 32 foot-long bed of embers. Seven people who took the barefoot walk discovered something terrible. Fiery coals can burn bare skin. Hit with agonizing pain, they ended the walk with a trip to the ER.<sup>2</sup>

Our message is not one of self confidence flowing from self delusion. But our message is pure because it is a message of God's grace and there alone can we have confidence.

### **We have a pure motive**

Not only does our message not come from our own fertile imaginations, our motives for what we say and do does not flow from our own fetid hearts. Paul says that our appeal comes not from impurity – a term that often referred to sexual misconduct, but may refer to any mixed motives that could propel a person to speak for their own gain.

There are many writers during Paul's day that wrote of traveling religious teachers of every ilk whose motives were less than pure. Many of the mystery religions and Greek cults practiced and even exalted sexual perversion. Those religions were very popular because in most of them the primary religious experience centered on the cult adherents having sex with a ritual temple prostitute or the cult leader. The problems of today's TV evangelists and Christian celebrities are little different from 2000 years ago.

### **We have a pure method**

When Paul says that their appeal does not spring from any attempt to deceive, he uses a word that carries with it the idea of baiting a hook. The method he uses is not just to get people to join his church like a clever salesperson closing a deal. Method, message and motive are all intertwined. All must find their confidence in what God has done.

There is a temptation for us today to bait and switch, to lure people to Christian faith with promises of ease and comfort. Paul's very presence in Thessalonica prevented such a method. Purity in content and delivery are the essence of the gospel.

The confidence though comes not from the self discovery of making oneself fit, but in being approved by God. What matters is what God pronounces to be true.

Paul's confidence is based in the credential given to him. It is God who has approved him, not the people of Philippi or Thessalonica. The word *approved* and *tests* in v4 are the same. It is used of testing or proving the quality of something. A distiller speaks of the proof of liquor. The old method was to put equal amounts of liquor and gunpowder and apply it to a flame. If it failed to ignite, the spirit was too weak, if it burned too brightly, then too strong. If it produced an even blue flame, it was just right, 100% proof as it was proved to be about 50% alcohol.

The proving of a Christian involves testing to determine the genuineness of character, of his or her trustworthiness. An important goal Paul mentions here is that they do not seek to please man but God.

This testing continues today for all of us, but especially for those who are to be entrusted with the gospel. Kyle has been with us for six years and we have seen his consistency and dedication, it is not enough that he thinks he should be a minister of the gospel nor even that we think he is okay.

For our denomination there are exams and qualifying events in a minister's life. One of the chief aspects is not just his handle on God's Word and his mastery of theology, but whether he is a man pleaser or seeks to please God.

Our ordination is merely a recognition that God has entrusted him with the gospel

### **WE SHOULD BE CONFIDENT BECAUSE GOD ENTRUSTS US WITH INTEGRITY 5-6**

Not only does God give us a gospel that is a pure message with a pure motive and a pure method, he also gives us integrity. We are to be confident because the standard to which we are called is one of honesty. Paul lists three components of integrity in vv5-6.

### **Integrity keeps us authentic**

Our words should not flatter. In ancient world flattery was not so much saying nice things about people, but shaping one's message to fit popular opinion, it is at its heart politically correct speech. It is opposite of boldness.

It has been said that there are only two groups of people who fall for flattery: men and women. But the trouble is the flattering words sound so good. But at the Danish proverb reminds us:  
Flatterers look like friends just as wolves resemble dogs. Treachery lurks in honeyed words.

Gossip is saying behind a person's back what you would never say to his or her face; flattery is saying to a person's face what you would never say behind his or her back. Paul would not be known as the Rev. Eddie Haskell.

Yet it is not uncommon for preachers to craft what they will say so as not to offend or to please their congregation. If we were to construct our worship with the unbeliever in mind, we are seeking to flatter the audience. To do that would be to lack integrity; we would not be authentic as to who and what we are. I need not try to craft my message to win you to this church, if I compromise God's truth.

### **Integrity keeps us from avarice**

The two traps of preachers are sex and money. The pastorate is not a quick road to riches, but it does provide the opportunity to get your hands on other people's money.

In his book, *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distorts the News*, Bernard Goldberg recounts a pivotal moment in television news. In the early 1970s, CBS president Dick Salant told staffers, "I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is, for the first time in history, *CBS News* made money last quarter. The bad news is, for the first time in history, *CBS News* made money last quarter."

Goldberg writes, "Salant knew, everyone knew. If news could actually make money, the suits who ran the networks would expect just that. Sure, they would want quality in theory. But they wanted ratings and money in fact." In the words of Don Hewitt, creator of *60 Minutes*, "Before they would say, 'Make us proud.' Now they tell us, 'Make us money.'"<sup>3</sup>

It is hard because, like it or not, there is a business side to church. Bills must be paid. But we must never seek confidence in the bottom line. Each week we put our finances in the bulletin to keep the Cornerstone family apprised of our current status. But the moment we use those figures to measure our health, we are already very sick.

### **Integrity keeps us from adulation**

To be confident is to stop making other's opinions your gauge to success. The quickest path to failure is to try to please everyone. Timothy Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, writes:

Pastors often hear, "I work my fingers to the bone in this church, and what thanks do I get?" Is that the way it is? Your service was for thanks? Are you in your right mind? Servanthood begins where gratitude and applause ends.<sup>4</sup>

But people spend their lives seeking approval. Want their confidence built up by the endorsement of others. The Internet provides opportunity for people to put themselves on display—and they do in a variety of ways. At one site alone, over four million people have posted a photo asking others to rate their appearance. The question is, why, especially when the exposure is often less than flattering, even degrading.

A woman named Angela exemplifies the behavior. She subjected herself to brutal comments and a low rating of 1.0 on a 10-point scale, trading it for the joy of finding an admirer or two. Angela said, "It really picked up my esteem to know that there are still some people out there who find me beautiful."

A *New York Times* article suggests the reason for this phenomenon "is that the world is crowded with people so hungry for attention that they will submit to any number of indignities for even a small bit of it."<sup>5</sup>

To this the gospel comes and tells us we belong to the God who created us.

TS baptism is a great place to find our confidence – not based on what we've done, but on God's promise to us

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<sup>1</sup> Men of the Covenant, pp. 150, taken from a John Piper sermon, We Had Boldness in Our God, 5/30/93

<sup>2</sup> "The Power of Belief," The Week (9-17-04); [www.ananova.com/news/story/sm\\_1094227.html](http://www.ananova.com/news/story/sm_1094227.html); [www.skeedz.com](http://www.skeedz.com)

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Goldberg, Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distorts the News (Perennial, 2002), p. 90

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Keller, Ministries of Mercy (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1997), p. 139

<sup>5</sup> Gary Rivlin, "Facing the World with Egos Exposed," NYTimes.com (6-3-04)