

## 1 Thessalonians 2 (1-2) – Invincible Courage

Today, I'm going to talk about building and maintaining courage, in every facet of your life. And I'm not talking about having a misplaced and misguided confidence. There are a lot of confident fools out there. Christians shouldn't be like that. But no matter how complex your situations may be, no matter how hard life gets, and no matter how uncertain the path seems, the gospel of God's grace can equip and empower you with invincible courage. This is what the Apostle Paul had, and what you can have.

Sometimes it's hard to have courage when you aren't sure of yourself, or what you ought to do. There are so many competing voices out there, and so much different advice, even when it comes to the Bible and church. No matter what you do, someone won't like it. And sometimes that someone is you. Life presents you with choices that aren't so cut and dried.

Trying to do the right thing in the right way for the right reasons can be a very hard goal to achieve. I would think that most every Christian would like to do the right thing in the right way for the right reasons. But people are dealing with more than one thing at a time. And you can have a good conscience about it, and you might still be missing the target in some way.

And no matter how careful you are, there will always be people who question your actions, or lack of action, or your decisions, your priorities, and your motives. Sometimes people are genuinely trying to help you. Sometimes people are just trying to hurt you. Sometimes people are dissatisfied with life, so they project their problems onto you. And there may be people who are demonically inspired and sinfully motivated.

False accusation, slander, and active aggression happened to Jesus (Matthew 9:10-11, 11:19 / Mark 15:3, 10, 12:13-17 / Luke 7:39, 19:7 / John 15:25). It happened to his disciples (Acts 5:33, 40, 6:9-14, 7:54). It happened to the Apostle Paul (Acts 9:23, 21:28, 22:22). Why would it be different with you (Matthew 5:11-12, 10:25 / John 15:18-21, 17:14)?

You can't always go along to get along. And trying to win the world by acting worldly is not godly. Desiring to be liked by the world means you are of the world, and not of God (Luke 6:26 / James 4:4 / 1 John 3:13, 4:5). God can still use these situations to mature you (2 Corinthians 12:14-15 / Galatians 4:16), and help you navigate life and ministry with wisdom. And in all your situations, it is good to pray, and ask God to reveal your heart to you, and lead you in the right way (Psalm 19:12-14, 139:23-24).

While Paul was in Thessalonica, his preaching had made many converts, a small number of Jews, many "God-fearing" Greeks, and some leading women, who were probably Gentiles (Acts 17:4, cf. 17:12). The unbelieving Jews were jealous of Paul, so they gathered a mob and started an uproar (Acts 17:5), claiming that Paul and Silas were supporting another king besides Caesar (Acts 17:7). The reason that people got worked up over this was because Thessalonica was a free city. But if Rome heard that they were supporting a new king, Rome would strip Thessalonica of its free status.

After Paul had left Thessalonica, the Jews and others were still attacking him, his credentials, his motives, and his ministry. They probably said all Paul wanted was your money. The Jews would have said that he's not even an apostle, and he has no right to tell you what to do. So, Paul addresses the slander and sets the record straight for the Thessalonian believers. He defends his ministry so that you can understand proper conduct, good conscience, and godly courage as you engage in life and ministry.

2 Corinthians 4:1-2 says – *Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.* Truth matters. And false teaching misrepresents God to people. My aim is to preach the truth of God, from the word of God, in the name of God, by the power of God, to the glory of God. This is what will truly edify the people of God. And that's what it means to truly be a man of God. May my aim be true. That is what I ask from God.

*our coming to you was not in vain* – Paul says *our*, which means Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Their time with the Thessalonians was not in vain, it was fruitful. Chapter 1 detailed the evidence of this. And their ministry was not for a selfish purpose. It was not for vainglory (boasting). If they had come just for their own benefit, their ministry would have become empty.

The Thessalonians knew that Paul and his ministry partners had gone about things in the right way, and for the right reasons. But others were attacking them, and Paul gives a defense in order to teach the Thessalonians how they should go about things and how to remain stable when things are difficult. This is not just advice; this is the word of God. And so, this is not just about ministry, but about all of your life, in whatever situation you may be in.

Paul is explaining his message, his methods, and his motivations. And although this is a minister talking about how he approaches and accomplishes his ministry, this has relevance for you and me, and all Christians. Because all Christians are disciples of Jesus Christ. And all Christians are called to disciple others. Again, this is not just about ministry, but about all of your life, in whatever situation you may be in.

A disciple is a follower of Jesus. To disciple others is to help them follow Jesus. A disciple is called to a disciplined direction in life towards Jesus and his teachings as revealed in the Bible. And all Christians disciple others, in many ways. In Mark Dever's book, *Discipling* (pg. 13), he says – "Discipling is deliberately doing spiritual good to someone so that he or she will be more like Christ." And the command to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20) applies to all who follow Jesus, not just to pastors and missionaries.

Discipleship is truth transferred through relationship. And so, discipleship is not simply the *programs* of the church, but the *culture* of the church. The local church community must aim to help others move, through example and experience, and with mercy and grace, to become more like Jesus. In every aspect of the church's community life, people should be helping one another grow in godliness, and live out that godliness in their daily lives.

In this section of Scripture, Paul reveals three crucial ingredients for effective discipleship: the message, the method, and the motive. The message is the gospel (vs.2, 4, 8, and 9). The method is love for others (vs7-9, 11-12). And the motive is to please God (vs.3-6). If you're clear on the gospel, evident in your love for others, and aiming to please God from your heart, your ministry, and your whole life, will be faithful. And it will be fruitful. You will be effective and successful according to God's measure. And God will use you to help others grow to be more like Christ. And you will have courage.

In Paul's day, and in any day, there are a lot of false teachings and false teachers. And there are more charlatans and shenanigans coming every day. Ungodly people are looking for money, influence, power, prestige, or to accomplish some agenda, or satisfy whatever ungodly motives they may have. Philippians 1:15 – *Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.* 2 Corinthians 2:17 – *For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word.* Galatians 4:17 – *They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.* 2 Peter 2:3 – *And in their greed they will exploit you with false words.*

What is the difference between true and false discipleship? True discipleship rests on, and builds on, the foundation of the gospel as revealed in God's Word. It's about following Jesus, and becoming more like him. It is godliness. False teachers build people's self-esteem and tell them how Jesus can help you be your best, most satisfied self. It is worldliness.

People were attacking the motives of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. And Paul knew that others would also attack the Thessalonians in the same way. So, Paul reminds the Thessalonians of what they had already experienced: vs.1 (*you yourselves know*), vs.2 (*as you know*), vs.5 (*as you know*), vs.9 (*For you remember*), vs.10 (*You are witnesses*), vs.11 (*For you know*).

In Philippi, Paul and Silas had been preaching the gospel and delivering people from demonic power. But this upset the money-making status quo. So, Paul and Silas were attacked and put into prison (Acts 16:22-24). But that

didn't stop Paul and Silas from praising the Lord. And God delivered them from the prison, and saved the jailer and his family. But Paul was going to be bold whether or not he was delivered from that jail, or any jail.

Opposition didn't stop Paul. It could stop him for the moment. But it couldn't stop his message, his method, or his motive. Think about that. Paul was bold in Philippi, and it cost him. But he didn't change his strategy. And he was bold in Thessalonica, and he would be bold everywhere he went.

This was the way of the Apostles. Acts 5:27-29 – *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men....* Acts 5:40-42 – *and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. This is the way it should be with disciples.*

Paul knew that he would face fierce opposition everywhere he went. Acts 20:23-24 – *...the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*

Paul knew that he might be harassed, and hindered, and harmed, and put in prison. But Paul also knew that even if he was stopped, the word of God was not stopped. 2 Timothy 2:8 – *Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!*

Jesus said the gates of Hell will not stop the spread of his church (Matthew 16:18). Paul had confidence in the gospel, and in God's design to spread the

message whenever, wherever, to whomever, and through whomever he wanted to. That is what gave him courage.

Paul knew that unless and until his God given mission was complete, he would not, and could not die. And Paul knew when he had finished the race, and he was ready. 2 Timothy 4:6-8 – *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

Paul was telling the Thessalonians, and all Christians, that ...*all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived* (2 Timothy 3:12-13). And still, no matter how bad things may get, you should have courage – *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it* (2 Timothy 3:14). Paul had courage, because his convictions were deeper than any hard circumstances or bad consequences.

My life is the mission of God. And I praise God that he called me to his mission. I'll have obstacles, and I'll face opposition, but I'll have courage. If God desires for me to continue, I will. But when it's the end of my mission, so be it, and praise the Lord. I know that until I complete God's mission for me, I am invincible. And the end of God's mission for me is not the end of the mission of God. And the end of God's earthly plan for me is not the end of God's eternal plan for me. I will not lose, and I cannot lose, because even when I lose, Jesus still wins. He is the focus of my life, and my eternity. This is the truth of the gospel, and the lens by which I see and live life.

This is the creed of Christian courage. No matter what you're dealing with, what situations you're in, what choices there are, or what decisions you need to make, you can still live the gospel, you can still love people, and you can still aim to please God. Focusing on the proper message, the proper method, and the proper motive will give you courage in all of your life. Amen.