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An Effective Minister, Part 1

The essence of Kingdom ministry is the imparting of the word of God into the lives of those around us. This involves encouraging people with the word, building them up, establishing the so that they might do the same with others. Paul told Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:2, "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

The Great Commission states this:

Matthew 28:19, "...make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you..."

What constitutes true religion?

James 1:27, "...visiting [which means bringing God's word to bear upon the difficult circumstances of...] widows and orphans in their distress..."

What is it that will catch the eye of the Lord on the Last Day?

Matthew 25:36 "...I was sick, and you visited Me [same word as in James]; I was in prison, and you came to Me."

This is the calling and so the task that God has placed on every one of our lives. This is what we must be about as singles, marrieds, parents, older siblings, grandparents, churchmen, workers, etc.

From this it should be obvious that it is God's intention that each of us engage in the ministry of building God's word into the lives of others. This truly is what God has tasked us with while on the earth!

Yet how are to go about this? How is the task to be done properly? 1 Thessalonians 2 answers these questions. Paul explains why his ministry was not as the many charlatans in his day; his was weighty, significant, impactful. How was that so? What is it that leads to effective ministry in God's Kingdom? What are the attributes of an Effective Minister? Notice first the an effective minister has a divinely wrought boldness.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2: "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, but [this is *ἀλλά* (*alla*)- a strong adversative in the Greek. In contrast to the fly-by-night charlatans that saturated the ancient world, Paul's ministry and message was of substance, and we see it here...] after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition."

The first thing that Paul speaks about here is "boldness," the idea behind this in the Bible is candor, unconstrained speech, and so a freedom to speak with no regard as to the consequence. The word carries with it two primary elements: (1) a lack of fear and (2) confidence.

This is how Paul brought the gospel to Thessalonica, he spoke with confidence, not fearing the wrath of an angry crowd or the consequences of serving the Lord! This is rather amazing if you know the greater context. Consider with me the treatment Paul had just received in Philippi for speaking the truth (1 Thessalonians 2:2; Acts 16:22-24).

1 Thessalonians 2:2a: "But after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi..."

The word for "suffered" speaks of physical abuse and so pain. The word for "mistreated" speaks of verbal or psychological abuse by which an individual is demoralized- it speaks of severe public ridicule and shame. Together, these words describe the general impression of Paul as he looked back upon his time in Philippi; quite frankly, it was horrifying!

Recall from Acts 16, while there Paul was stripped of his clothes (to demoralize him), beaten with rods- this would have been by the lictors who bound together several rods which supposedly symbolized Roman law and justice; his feet were placed in stocks and then he was thrown in prison. This was Paul's introduction to preaching in Macedonia... clearly he could expect nothing less anywhere else he would go in Greece!

Secondly, in contrast to what we might think, Paul was NOT naturally a bold person when it came to the gospel! Notice that Paul asked for prayer:

Ephesians 6:19-20, "And *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

We have this idea that since Paul went on three missionary journeys which eventually landed him in a jail in Rome (where, on account of his ministry, the gospel spread as far as Caesar's household) that Paul was naturally bold. He wasn't! The abuse that he suffered at times made him not want to open his mouth. And so he asked that the church pray for his boldness! We read of one of Paul's hopes as a minister of Christ:

Philippians 1:20, "...*that* with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."

Going into a ministry situation, Paul didn't know whether or not he would clam up. His hope was that he wouldn't such that if ministry led to his martyrdom, he nevertheless would boldly proclaim the Lord! Yet at times in his mind, clearly the jury was out.

Thirdly, when Paul arrived in Thessalonica, he and his companions immediately began to receive the same "opposition" that they received in Philippi we read here that they preached "...the gospel of God amid much opposition." The word is *ἀγών* (*agōn*) which was used in the Olympic games of Paul's day of a boxing match where the loser had his eyes plucked out. It is a strong word denoting a life and death struggle and so severe, external conflict. Gordon Fee explains:

The metaphor lying behind this word suggests a great struggle on the part of Paul and his companions in their preaching Christ in Thessalonica. (Fee, 2009, p. 59)

When Paul speaks here of a "boldness/inward freedom" to preach the gospel in Thessalonica, we must see that this was a BIG DEAL! How many times would a charlatan be beaten before he would pack up and move on? Just the threat of punishment alone would make many scatter.¹ Yet not with Paul... not at this time... not in this place!

Why was that? Notice the verse, "...we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition." How is it that Paul spoke with boldness in Thessalonica? Notice a couple of things: First Paul's gaze had been placed upon God- "...we had the boldness IN our God!" The idea behind this is that God's glorious character was that which was driving Paul. As it was in the lives of the prophets- Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah- all of whom was given a glimpse at the greatness of God prior to being commissioned by God, so Paul likewise entered into ministry (cf. Acts 9). I am

reminded of Peter in the boat.

In Matthew 14:25, Christ came walking on the water. While the other disciples sat cowering in the boat, Peter stepped onto the stormy waves in order to come to his Lord. You know the passage: As long as Peter's gaze was fixed on Christ, he walked on the water! But when Peter took his focus off of Christ and placed it on the storm, he began to sink! Brothers and sisters, such was the gaze of Paul! As long as his gaze was the "Lord," the Sovereign one, the Great I Am, he had boldness!

Secondly, Paul was mindful that he was a servant, not of man, but of God. "We had the boldness in OUR God." The idea is NOT that Paul or the Thessalonians owned God, BUT that they were in the service of God. It is similar in concept to being "the king's messenger." That being the case, in all that Paul did he was mindful that the Lord was watching; accordingly, it was His will that matter! Ever and always, he was at the beckoned call of God!

Paul also understood that God had entrusted to him a calling to be a herald of an eternal message. "We had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel OF GOD." This is NOT the normal way Paul talked about the gospel. In 1 Thessalonians 3:2 he will adopt the normal language, "the gospel of/concerning Christ." Here he uses "the gospel of God" which speaks of its divine origin! Paul's ministry and his message did not arise in the imaginations of his heart; what he was the proclaiming of a message whose origin could be traced to eternity past (cf. Ephesians 1)!

So boldness in Paul's ministry did NOT come as he summoned great strength from within. RATHER, boldness came in Paul's life as he lived mindful of the greatness of God, his calling as a servant of God, and the eternal origin of the message entrusted to him. We see it in Ephesians 3 where Paul rooted all ministerial boldness to Christ.

Ephesians 3:12, "...Christ [the exalted one] Jesus [the humble one] our Lord [the sovereign one]!"

It was only as Paul lived mindful of the greatness of Christ and the glorious message of His coming that he had boldness in his speech! After contrasting the glory that accompanied the giving of the law (think of Ex. 19-20) with that of the glory of justification, Paul wrote this:

2 Corinthians 3:12, "Having therefore such a hope [reconciliation], we use great boldness in *our* speech."

Truly, a glorious and divine Being dying on a cross to reconcile sinful man to Himself imbued Paul with incredible boldness! If Christ could give so much for us, ought we not for Him? The first attribute of an effective minister in God's Kingdom is that they have a Biblical vision/understanding of Christ and His gospel which gives them the freedom to speak the truth with little or no regard to the consequences!

From this I hope you see what we must therefore be about! Before we DO anything in the name of Christ, we first must BE in the business of growing in our understanding of God, His person and work! The Scottish preacher, James Stewart, said that the aims of all preaching are:

...to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, [and] to devote the will to the purpose of God. (Stewart, 2010, p. 73)

If that is correct, then you must see that this is the aim of any and all study of the word of God. It is NOT to get a private blessing... rather it is to grow in your understanding of the glory and the greatness of God! Insofar as this is true of you, you will enjoy an Effective Ministry in Christ's Kingdom!

The effective minister is driven by a passion to please God.

1 Thessalonians 2:3, "For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit."

Paul used three words here which aptly described what impelled the many "pleaders with a cause" of his day. The word denotes "delusion" or "wandering"- it was used of planets that *wander* about the sky (in fact, it is from this word we get the English, "planet"). The reference here is to false or erroneous doctrine. From this we note that Paul's ministry, and for that matter, effective ministry was and is NOT the result of erroneous doctrine. Effective ministry is the overflow of right doctrine. The more orthodox we are in our understanding of God's word, the more we will engage in a ministry that will mean something.

This is so important! Many throughout church history and even today have ministered with bad theology which resulted in all manner of hardship and difficulty. For example, one error into which we can fall is ministering for fruit. The one and only reason we minister in Christ's Kingdom is because we have been so called. Jesus said this:

John 17:4, "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do."

Yet, what happens when we set our focus on the fruit that we think ought to come as a result of our efforts? We quickly burn out! I so identify with Jeremiah's words:

Jeremiah 20:8b-9a, "...for me the word of the Lord has resulted in reproach and derision all day long. [Jeremiah here is lamenting the lack of fruit in his ministry. Where did this lead him?] But if I say, 'I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name'..."

Do you know how many people will leave kingdom ministry this year because they don't see any fruit? Truly if persecution and difficulty has claimed its thousands, poor theology in ministry has claimed its ten thousands! Paul's ministry was NOT out of corrupt theology. RATHER, he was governed by truth and led by truth- and so he preached.

Another motive that drove many a "pleader with a cause" in Paul's day was impurity. The word here speaks of moral impurity and so immorality, filth, refuse, rotteness, and even sensuality. The word primarily denotes sexual impurity in the bible, but in our context it clearly has a broader use (cf. also Romans 6:19; Ephesians 4:19).² Truly many a "pleader with a cause" was driven out of an

immoral lust for money, popularity, adulation, sex, or pleasure. Paul states here that such was NOT the drive in his ministry!

Now you would think that such a motive would not be named amongst God's people, but you would be wrong. Do you know what it means to adulterate the gospel? It means sharing it with any other motive than love for God. I've seen this many times in the church people ministering with many different motives:

- To get praise.
- To get a pat on the back.
- Because they like teaching.
- Because they like being the one in charge.
- Because they like being first.

All of these are an adulteration of the gospel and so NOT that on which an effective ministry is built or based.

Another motive that drove the "pleader with a cause" in Paul's day was deceit. The word literally means "bait," "fish hook," or "trap." It was used in reference to catching fish by means of bait, primarily a snare. Hence, the word is translated in the Bible as "guile," "deceit," and "trickery" (think of the snake oil salesmen). In the context of public teaching or ministry, the focus revolves around the acquisition of money. Truly, the "pleaders for a cause" resorted to all kinds of devices in order to deceive people in order to get them to give their money. Sadly today, many a ministry likewise is done out of a passion to get money. And it is NOT just amongst the "health and weathers"!

The story is told of a church which was shutting their doors. Because of a recent hurricane, many families had moved away. So the pastor had a meeting of all the local churches to discuss what they could do. It seemed that unless they got five more "giving" families they would have to shut their doors. Over a period of more than two hours, suggestion after suggestion was given on how to get more giving units. This wasn't a discussion on how this church could impact their community with the gospel and be more effective as a church in their discipleship, etc. It was all about how they could get more money in their church. In the end this group was no different than the prosperity preachers who look at people as nothing more than a way to acquire wealth.

This wasn't Paul AND this ought never to be a genuine servant of Christ! The effective servant of the Lord is NOT driven by error, impurity, or a lust for money. What then ought he to be driven by?

1 Thessalonians 3:4b, "But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts

If the "pleaders with a cause" were man-pleasers, Paul wanted it known that he was just the opposite; he was a God-pleaser. He lived to honor, know, and glorify the Lord! That secondly is what Effective Ministry is all about! There is no greater example of this than Paul's address to the believers in Galatia.

As we saw last time, one of the ways we as sinners endeavor to oppose a teaching is to slander the teacher. This clearly was the case on the part of Paul's detractors in Thessalonica. But so it was amongst the false believers in Galatia. The first reason they said Paul should NOT be heeded was that he was a man-pleaser (meaning, in all that he taught and spoke, he did so to tickle the ears of man... to get people to like him). Notice Paul's response:

Galatians 1:8-10a, "...even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. *For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men?...*"

Clearly Paul was not a man-pleaser! His focus was on God- serving Him, honoring Him, exalting Him, pleasing Him. Truly, that which drove him in his ministry was NOT fruit, pleasure, money, adulation, glory, security, guilt, and the like. That which drove him was Christ and Him crucified! The word for "pleased" (ἀρέσκω [*areskō*]) means "to be well-disposed" or "to take a pleasant attitude toward." It is used in Scripture synonymously with "walking with God" (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:1; nb., the LXX uses "pleased" in place of "walked" in Genesis 5:22). The idea is that the love-relationship Paul had with God impelled him in his ministry.

This will always be the case for effective ministers in God's Kingdom! In this regard, I love the picture presented in Scripture of the heart-beat of the Genuine Servant of the Lord. Korah reared his sons well; notice their passion:

Psalms 42:1-2, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?"

Psalms 143:5b-6, "I meditate on all Thy doings; I muse on the work of Thy hands. I stretch out my hands to Thee; my soul *longs* for Thee, as a parched land."

Psalms 73:25-26, "Whom have I in heaven *but Thee*? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

Isaiah 26:9a, "At night my soul longs for Thee, indeed, my spirit within me seeks Thee diligently..."

In this context therefore, let me caution you; the tendency will be to judge the quality of your service by external acts of godliness:

- How much you pray.
- How much you read.
- The things you do.
- How you spend your free time.

Yet these are false indicators of a healthy minister or ministry. Notice the final words of Paul:

1 Thessalonians 2:4, "But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts."

Don't miss it: *The heart of the matter has always been the matter of the heart!* We can misjudge our ministries or listen to those who do likewise, and so consider ourselves pretty good if we do the right things or say the right words. Consider with me the exhortation of Archibald Brown:

You may counterfeit words; you may counterfeit actions; but you cannot counterfeit desires... Let me know my desire, then do I know myself; for I can no more counterfeit a desire than I can counterfeit fire... A good action may be done without any love to that action. And... an evil action may be avoided not from any hatred to that evil... the desire of the soul, that is the immediate issue of the heart... The desire of the true Christian is after God Himself. The Psalmist wrote, 'My heart and my flesh cry out for God' (Psalm 84:2). This desire swallows up all others! (Brown, 1879)

So servant of God, where is your focus today? Is your service the overflow of a heart given to the Lord? Is your lifelong goal the knowledge of Christ?... being conformed to His image?... and so loving Him, serving Him, bringing glory to Him? Is Christ the object of your desires?

If He is NOT- and I suspect that is the case for most of you- begin this morning by crying out to God that He might be! *"Lord! Give me undistracted devotion! Wean my heart from this world and its empty promises and hopes! Feed that sense of hunger and thirsting that can only be satisfied in You!"*

Effective ministry, as judged from the Kingdom of God, begins and ends here!

Bibliography

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End Notes

¹ D. M. Martin wrote, “What charlatan would suffer so much abuse for so little (cf. v. 9) reward? Only true believers commissioned and emboldened by God would persevere in the face of persecution.” (*1, 2 Thessalonians*, NAC, p. 71)

² William Hendriksen wrote, “Did these opponents ascribe sexual uncleanness to Paul, Silas, and Timothy?— Pagan religions were characterized by immorality. Did they perhaps insinuate that it was strange that so many women were to be found among the converts? Cf. Acts 17:4. The context, however, does not point in that direction. Desire for money and a hankering after honor, rather than sexual aberration, seem to have been the vices of which they accused the missionaries.” (*Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*, NTC, p. 62)