

DECLARE THE GOSPEL OF GOD 1 THES 2:1-13
20TH SUN. AFTER PENT./REFORMATION OCT 26, 2014

¹ For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed— God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

⁹ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

¹³ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

How many have used a filter wrench?

It is used to remove oil filter from car engine.

It is able to something turn that doesn't want to turn
and can be hard to get a grip on.

Maybe could also be handy in kitchen to open jars.

I once tried to remove stubborn oil filter without one
by driving a screwdriver through it to use as a handle.

It was a mess.

Value of this kind of wrench is it can work in a way
that is both powerful and careful, not crushing.

God's word of gospel is like filter wrench.

It grabs hold of people and makes them turn in repentance.
God's word of gospel comes to us boldly, with power
but God works gently, lovingly and patiently with us,
working with his word to give us forgiveness and life.
So, like Paul, we can...

DECLARE GOD'S GOSPEL WITH BOLDNESS
DECLARE GOD'S GOSPEL WITH GENTLENESS
DECLARE GOD'S GOSPEL WITH CONFIDENCE

DECLARE GOD'S GOSPEL WITH BOLDNESS

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Paul's ministry was characterized by boldness.

He didn't hesitate to go to towns where he knew nobody
and start talking about touchy subject of religion
including wild idea of resurrection from the dead.

He didn't mind telling people they were wrong
and argue with objectors about what Bible said.

He didn't worry about what people thought of him.

Although he did care what God thought of him
and was careful to avoid impure motives or deception.

Time after time he was beaten and jailed for what he did
as he was in Philippi, but he didn't keep quiet.

his singing in jail there helped lead jailer to faith
and when he was released, he went right down road to
Thessalonica (where he wrote this to) & did it again.

As we celebrate Reformation today, we are reminded of Luther.

God made him bold as well, once he discovered the gospel.

He talked and wrote about it all the time.

And he pointed out all the things in church that contradicted
gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone
and insisted they were wrong.

When he was ordered by church leaders & even emperor
to stop & recant, he refused, though life was threatened.

This reminds us gospel needs to be declared boldly still today.

We need to be less concerned about what people think of us
than what they think of God and the saving gospel.

This takes some courage, although we are not apt to be
beaten or imprisoned or have our life threatened.

It is worth cost of time and money
and sometimes political incorrectness.

So why is such boldness necessary? because of opposition.

And why is there such strong opposition,

Why do people get so upset at others simply saying
what they think and believe about Jesus?

What is so terrible about saying God wants to save
& forgive you for free although you don't deserve it.

Problem is this necessarily means we need to be saved
because we are not good enough to deserve
anything but condemnation and punishment.

Gospel is an insult to natural human idea I am good enough
& any problem or fault I have I can fix myself if I try enough.

We are like little children who refuse help getting dressed
and insist "I do a self"

We must continue to declare the gospel with boldness
because even in Christian church is continued temptation
to think my faith must somehow depend on my decision
and success of our church must somehow depend on
our using the right kind of human pleasing methods.

And yet, at the same time we must remember to...

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blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know
how, like a father with his children, ¹² we exhorted each one of you
and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of
God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

When something is hard to move, it takes great strength
to move it slowly and carefully.

The weak have to resort to shoving, jerking or pounding.

Moving human hearts to faith must be done gently
because although they may be just as hard to turn,
they are more easily crushed than oil filters or jars.
and crushing defeats the purpose.

Paul knew this, that even though those he talked to
could be as unreasonably stubborn as little children
they were still to be treated gently as little children.
When facing opposition, he applied Jesus instruction
to be wise as serpents but gentle as doves.

Maybe because he knew from his own heart, as we should also,
how hard it is to give up on idea of our own goodness
and accept the free gift of God's grace.

So no matter how he was threatened and slandered,
he never used threats or exaggerated personal shame.

Even when he gained a position of influence
he did not use it to make things easier for himself.

He did not insist on his own rights
but simply the right of the Gospel to be heard.

Again, we need to remember to be like this still today.

It is so easy to be self-righteous and indignant toward those
who don't seem to see or understand what we do.

It is easy to get frustrated or angry or give up on those
we may feel we are wasting time on.

Is easy to answer personal criticism with personal criticism
and demand our way if we are in majority.

But as Paul encourages walking in manner worthy of God
we must speak for God in a manner worthy of God.

If we are going to share God's love, grace, forgiveness
how can we do it except in a loving, gracious way?

So why is such patience and self-giving love important?
because this is how God has come to us.

Paul writes: we were ready to share with you not only
the gospel of God but also our own selves

God shared the gospel with us by giving us his own self.

Jesus humbled himself to be an obedient child.

He did this to first communicate God's love to us
with words & actions in person as the word made flesh
and then also to willingly suffer and die for us

to take the consequences of our stubborn rebellion.

In Jesus' death & resurrection we see ultimate power of God
united with ultimate gentleness and humility.

This action of Jesus is the only thing with enough power
to break the grip of sin, death and the devil on us
without crushing us along with them.

God applies this power and this love to us in his word of Gospel,
this is why we can...

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¹³ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received
the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the
word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work
in you believers.

I am able to be both powerful & careful when I have right tool.

God's word is his power tool he gives us to use.

If God grabbed us bare handed with his power,
he could make us do anything, but it would crush us.

God chooses instead to take hold of us, turn us to faith,
using tool of his word which is powerful but we can resist,

So if we have faith, it is caused entirely by God's doing
but if we don't it is entirely because of our doing.

We work with both power & gentleness by simply speaking
God's word of the gospel

because it is not just our words but God's word
and God's word is what does the work.

As letter to Hebrews says, God's word is living and active.

God's word takes hold of people & turns them to faith.

God's word causes what it says to be true.

When God says we are forgiven, it makes us righteous.

God's word is what gives us personal confidence.

When we read Bible, it is not just human opinions & stories,
but God's inspired word. We can be sure

Jesus did what he did & keeps his promises.

When we are baptized it is not just our demonstrating faith
but God's word calling us his children so we can be sure.

When we receive communion, it is God's own word
that makes it to be Jesus' body and blood

so we can be confident of his gifts.

People do resist God's word because they prefer to value
what they can do and understand.

We must resist the temptation to think this can be overcome
by things we have to do rather than power of word itself.

What we continue to do is

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in the face of human opposition to anything
that calls into question our own goodness & ability.

And at same time,

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like a loving parent dealing with a child
because this is how God's grace works with us
and it is the message of how Jesus has
lovingly given himself to save us.

We can always

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because it is God's own word that we share
and the power is in the tool of his word
to turn us to faith and give us life now and forever.