

Boldness

"Grant unto Thy servants that with all boldness they may speak Thy Word"—Acts 4:29

THE prophet Isaiah had complete confidence in God in the face of tribulation, as the following passage (Is. 50:5-9) shows—

"The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.

"I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

"For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

"He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together; who is mine adversary? let him come near to me.

"Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up."

The prophet had complete confidence in the final triumph of right according to God's plan, and he therefore determined to set his "face like a flint" to obey God in all things without fear of man. The hard, unyielding nature of flint speaks to us of uncompromising firmness.

This characteristic will be found growing in all the servants of God. The prophet described in the passage quoted above was clearly a type of Christ, and Christ was an exhibition of all the godly qualities which God's servants must endeavour to cultivate. If we believe God's promises with a "full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22), we will follow the example of Christ and the prophets and set our faces like flint against all opposition, in the confidence that if we "fear God, and keep His commandments" (Eccl. 12:13) we will "not be ashamed" though all carnal minds will be against us. The work of Christ and of the prophets was not easy and of themselves they could have done nothing.

Complete confidence in God was required so that God's power would enable them to continue to the end doing what God commanded.

As the servants of God today, endeavouring to "live godly in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:12) in the midst of prevailing godlessness, we find that our task is no easy one either, and nothing but unswerving submission to God and confidence in Him will enable us to overcome, "and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13). Strength is essential, and there is only one source where such strength can be found—

"Finally, my brethren, be strong IN THE LORD, and in the power of HIS MIGHT" (Eph. 6:10).

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ONE prominent reason for the difficulty involved in the task of the servants of God is found in God's command to Isaiah (58:1)—

"Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."

The work God requires is that work of overcoming the carnal mind in ourselves and replacing it with the spiritual mind, and doing the works of the spirit. But this work is not complete without our learning to fearlessly SPEAK OUT against the carnal mind and all its works, and this obviously places us in the position of attacking not only the flesh in ourselves but also the same flesh in others. By command of God we are directed not only to follow righteousness ourselves but also to **teach** righteousness and to **expose** and **warn** of wickedness.

The prophets did not find that exposing wickedness was a task a man would naturally desire. It did not make the prophets popular among those to whom they spoke, but rather it subjected them to much tribulation, and even death. We are exhorted (James 5:10)—

"Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the Name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience."

They endured and performed their work **because God commanded it**, and they had complete confidence in God, knowing that loving, eager, willing obedience to Him will give life, while disobedience to obtain present ease, advantage, and acceptance among carnal minds will bring everlasting destruction. "Behold, we count them happy (blessed) which endure" (James 5:11) as the prophets endured.

God solemnly warned His prophets that if they failed to expose wickedness as they were commanded, then the blood of the wicked would be required at the hands of the disobedient prophet.

God's command to Ezekiel points this out (33:7-9)—

"So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel. Therefore thou shalt hear the words at My mouth, and warn them from Me.

"When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; **but his blood will I require at thine hand.**

"Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but **thou hast delivered thy soul.**"

The latter day brethren of Christ cannot claim immunity from this principle either in relation to aliens or to brethren. We are commanded—

"Let your light so shine before men" (Matt. 5:16).

"Let him that heareth say, Come" (Rev. 22:17).

"Walk as children of light; have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:8, 11).

"Preach the Word. Be instant in season, out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2).

And (Heb. 3:13; 10:25)—

"Exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin—and so much the more as ye see The Day approaching."

If we REALLY desire to help the perishing, and if we REALLY love our brethren, our course will be to do everything possible to help others as well as ourselves to understand and follow more perfectly the way of life.

Without this endeavour to feed others, we do not really love them. It is recorded that God sent His prophets to **instruct** and **warn** His people—

"**Because** He had **compassion** on His people, and on His dwelling place" (2 Chron. 36:15).

One way in which **true** love and compassion is manifested is in always speaking the truth, courageously and boldly, "with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15), endeavouring to edify or build up. Some will hear and be instructed, but many will not. Either way we must ourselves continue to the end fearlessly confessing the Truth by word and example for, as Christ warned—

"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

Paul said to the elders of the ecclesia at Ephesus—

"By the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31).

Paul **loved** them, he **deeply** desired for them an eternal place in the favor of God, and **therefore** he instructed and warned them, even "with tears." Can we say, as Paul said: —

"I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you ALL the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27)?

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AS we consider our responsibility to **follow and teach righteousness** and to **expose and warn of wickedness**, let us take diligent heed to ourselves on the following four points:

1. All that we think and speak MUST BE SCRIPTURAL TRUTH.

"If any man speak, let him speak as the Oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11).

It is GOD'S Word we are dealing with, and we dare not add to it or take away from it. We are not at liberty to be lax or loose in our interpretation of God's Word, or to rationalize to make the Word mean what we would like it to mean or to fit any preconceived ideas about ourselves or others.

We must not speak our own words but rather the truth of God's Word. The prophet Ezekiel was instructed by God—

"Hear the word at MY mouth: warn them from ME."

The recorded Word is the means given to us for hearing at the mouth of God, and our endeavour must always be to understand God's Word as HE intended it should be understood, no matter where this may lead us.

And we are assured that if we lean not unto our own understanding, but diligently, humbly and prayerfully seek to know God's ways, He WILL teach them to us.

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2. When we speak the truth we must do it BOLDLY.

To speak boldly is to speak with complete confidence in God. The result of such boldness is that God's truth is set forth plainly, clearly, and fearlessly as it ought to be—and only when we DO set forth the truth in this manner will we be instruments of God for true edification.

On the other hand, to speak without boldness is to speak with fear of man, with the result that the whole truth is NOT plainly set forth. If we are afraid of man, if we are afraid because someone may not like the truth he hears, if we are afraid because someone may think the truth hurts his feelings, or if we are afraid because the speaker of truth will not be popular among some or many of his hearers, the inevitable result will be our weakening or softening the teaching of the Scriptures so as not to place ourselves in opposition to those we fear.

But who are we that we should be—

"Afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass"?

How can we forget the Lord our Maker—

"That hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth" (Isa. 51:12-13)?

If we weaken or soften the Word of God, we place ourselves in opposition to Him in Whose hand our breath is, and Who "hath power to cast into Gehenna" (Luke 12:5). Let us listen closely to the following words of God through Isaiah—

"Hearken unto Me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law.

"Fear ye not the reproach of men; neither be ye afraid of their revilings . . . I, even I, am He that comforteth you" (Isa. 51:7, 12).

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3. When we speak the truth boldly we must do it IN THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST.

It is easy and natural to speak in the spirit of the flesh, with anger, jealousy, or pride, or with a purpose to condemn or revile. But we must NOT speak in this easy, natural way. Rather we must speak in the spirit of Christ—truthfully, fearlessly, humbly, with longsuffering, with a purpose to heal, to strengthen, and to lead to righteousness.

The true spirit of Christ is not at all in opposition to our responsibility to boldly speak the truth.

We do not have the spirit of Christ if we fail to clearly point out to the best of our ability what is wrong and what is right **IN THE SIGHT OF GOD**; what is of the flesh and what is of the spirit; what leads to life and what leads to death.

But neither do we have the spirit of Christ if we speak or act harshly, haughtily, or unlovingly, or with any motive of the carnal mind.

This bold speaking of the truth in the spirit of Christ ought to be reciprocal, each of us helping one another and being helped. When you can help me to understand scriptural truth, I should not rebel but should rather rejoice and accept your help—and the same should be true when I can help you. Let us, then, speak **TRUTH**, speak it **BOLDLY**, speak it in the **SPIRIT OF CHRIST**, and finally—

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4. Let us take the truth we speak and APPLY IT TO OUR OWN LIVES.

If I can speak the truth boldly and in the spirit of Christ, it still is not working in my **own life** unless I, myself (no one else can do it for me) make a point of **applying** it to my own life. Each of us should always open our own ears to the things we believe we should preach to others.

Also, let us never forget that some things are more difficult for me to obey, while others are more difficult for you, and let us be patient with each other as we struggle with our individual weaknesses and difficulties.

BUT—let none of us ever stop working on himself, striving (agonizing) to recognize and overcome the ways of the carnal mind, and to put on the spiritual mind, praying continually for that strength which comes from God alone, and which alone can enable us to overcome.

It is by the goodness of God that we are permitted to serve Him, and it is by the goodness of God that flesh-crucifying, wholehearted service will be rewarded.

As we serve God, speaking His truth boldly in the spirit of Christ, we need to be constantly on the alert for the dangerous sign of **PRIDE** in what may appear to be good results of our endeavours. It is **GOD** Who gives the increase. If we, our minds, and our tongues can be instruments in God's work, we can only be thankful, but never proud (1 Pet. 4:11)—

"If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which GOD giveth; that God in ALL things may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

On the other hand, if the results do NOT appear to be good, if our endeavours bring only rebellion from others, then let us honestly and prayerfully examine ourselves to see if there was anything in our manner or in what we said that was not TRUTH or was not in the SPIRIT OF CHRIST. If we find any such fruit of the carnal mind we must immediately repent of the wrong and seek forgiveness.

But if in the sight of God we did speak truth in the spirit and manner of Christ, (and we can only do our best to know how we appear in God's sight by continual and humble approach to God and His Word in study, meditation, and prayer) then the rebellion will not be laid to our charge and it must not deter us from continuing to speak boldly. We must continue to be diligent in our service, leaving the results and consequences to God. The results and consequences are in God's hands, that He may be glorified.

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IT may be helpful to comment on one last thought. We are exhorted to be bold, and we are exhorted to be humble. It might seem that boldness and humility are incompatible qualities; that we can be bold OR humble, but not both. And yet we know that such could not be true since both qualities are required by God in His servants.

What is boldness? To be bold is to be confident, to speak openly, plainly and frankly, really believing and being assured of what is being spoken, standing one's ground with certainty. And this quality of boldness is not in opposition to TRUE humility, for the so-called humility which conceals God's truth or is apologetic and unsure about it is a FALSE humility. **True** humility goes hand in hand with **true** boldness. But let us be sure we understand what this true boldness or confidence really is.

If we are confident in self, feeling self-dependent, self-assured, able of ourselves to do anything, the world would say we are bold. But God would say our boldness is false and we are not humble and therefore not fit for His use. Therefore, it is not SELF-confidence which goes hand in hand with humility and which God requires in His servants. Self-confidence is arrogance and pride and is in opposition to humility.

The confidence or boldness God does require is the confidence we read of in Isaiah 50, confidence in God, dependence upon God, trust in God. We need to cultivate GOD-confidence, not SELF-confidence.

Boldness or God-confidence combines with true humility in this way: Humility says—

"I recognize I am nothing, and am completely dependent upon God."

Boldness says—

"I have complete confidence in God upon Whom I depend."

What we need to help us glorify God as we work to perform our duties well and to continually improve our service is not the development of SELF-confidence but rather the development of GOD-confidence—**confidence that if we do our part God will give us strength to develop and wisely use our God-given abilities and to patiently endure the reproach our boldness may bring from man.**

Let us with God-confidence set our faces like flint with humble boldness to adhere to God's truth no matter what the present consequences may be, determined to freely confess Christ in our thoughts, our actions, and our speech. If we are really assured of God's merciful promises and of His might and power and justice—if we really have confidence in Him—then let us live our lives accordingly, as unto God, and not to please men. —D.B.
