

# Courage to Speak the Word of God (Part One)

By Jay Wegter

In his wonderful book on the Psalms, *The 'I wills' of the Psalms* (Banner of Truth, 1985), P. B. Powers states, "How much readier would we be to enter conflict with evil, or to undertake difficult tasks for God, if only we could realize [that God Himself is willing to work together with us]." "God will work, let us expect Him to work, and He assuredly will" (p. 38-39). This confidence that God will join His power with our efforts led the psalmists to frequently express their resolve to trust the Lord and praise Him for His reliable faithfulness. The 'I wills' of the Psalms are a kind of prescription against double-mindedness. By energetically voicing their intent to *trust, praise, exult, proclaim, declare* and *tell*, the psalmists are consolidating their reliance upon God and are 'declaring war' upon all forms of wavering.

"I shall wash my hands in innocence, and I will go about Your altar, O LORD, that I may **proclaim** with the voice of thanksgiving and **declare all Your wonders**" (Ps 26:6-7).

"But as for me, I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more. My mouth **shall tell** of Your righteousness *and* of Your salvation all day long; For I do not know the sum of *them*. I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD; **I will make mention** of Your righteousness, Yours alone. O God, You have taught me from my youth, and I still **declare** Your wondrous deeds. And even when *I am* old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, **until I declare** Your strength to *this* generation, Your power to all who are to come" (Ps 71:14-18).

"But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, **that I may tell** of all Your works" (Ps 73:28).

*From the heart attitude of the psalmists alone, we may accurately conclude that it is impossible for a genuine believer to have merely a casual relationship to God's truth.* You might as well expect to have no problem with weapons-grade plutonium in your garage as a casual "hobby." Why every authority in the free world would be on you in an instant. Why you ask—because of the potential power in plutonium. So also, the Word of God is powerful beyond words. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but **divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses**" (2 Cor 10:3-4).

*The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. The work of Christ applied to our souls has equipped us for relationships which glorify God.* "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart" (1 Pet 1:22). It was Alexander MacLaren who said, "The gospel is not a mere message of deliverance, but a canon of conduct; it is not a theology to be accepted, but it is ethics to be lived. It is not to be believed only, but it is to be taken into life as a guide."

*The Word of God in our conversations is the very 'glue' which preserves our unity and promotes the 'deep community' we long to experience in the body of Christ.* When we prayerfully speak the Word of God to one another, we are celebrating the fact that we have life in Christ in common. No wonder the apostle Paul exhorted his readers to *be of the same mind, and say the same thing*. In other words, when Scripture fills the content of our conversations we will experience unity as our common faith is lived out corporately. "Make my joy complete by **being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose**" (Phil 2:2).

*It is common today in our Evangelical churches to seek unity through common interests and hobbies.* We see small groups formed around shared preferences: hiking, biking, sewing, sports, etc. But, this can be a substitute for the unity that can only come from a resolute commitment to God's truth.

Let's observe again just how much emphasis the N.T. places upon speaking our common faith to one another. "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord **you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**" (Rom 15:5-6). "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **that ye all speak the same thing**, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be **perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment**" (1 Cor 1:10, KJV). The fulfillment of these commands is only possible if we bring the Word of God into our conversations with one another.

*It is remarkable just how many N. T. commands govern how believers are to speak to one another.* Some of the most common verbs are *encourage, exhort, comfort, admonish, implore, edify, stimulate, and speak to one another*, etc. Not only must God's truth be communicated from the pulpit, but also within the 'relational space' of believers expressing spiritual care and parenting. This is not surprising because God intends that by His Word we might constantly be changed and transformed into the image of Christ. "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, **which also performs its work in you who believe**" (1 Thess 2:13).

*The divine mandate to speak God's truth to one another is undeniably clear.* In passages such as Deuteronomy 6:4-7, Psalm 78:5-8, and Colossians 3:16 it was evident that the role of the believer is that of a perpetual "**truth speaker**" (not just truth seeker). In strong churches, the God-given mandate of speaking God's truth will not be ignored or relegated to the job of the pastor (or to church leaders). The obedient believer understands that the spiritual state of those in his or her sphere depends in part upon the willingness to prayerfully speak God's truth. We must come to the point where we can tell ourselves, "I am not loving the people around me properly *unless* I am willing to speak God's truth to them."

*When we examine the example of the O.T. Prophets and the example of Jesus and the Apostles, it is obvious that their truth speaking was pointed—it was not general, but filled with penetrating application for their listeners.* It was more like a well-aimed sniper bullet than a broad spray of buckshot. It is at this juncture (a penetrating application) in truth speaking that our courage is most likely to give out. We are tempted to yield to the pressure exerted by our **comfort zone**. We fear being the "heavy," a meddler, or regarded as judgmental, legalistic, or "holier than thou."

So we must ask the question, what enabled believers like Elihu, Phinehas, Deborah, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Daniel to fearlessly speak the truth when they were a minority of one? The answer lies in their zeal for God's honor and glory. **They knew that all of history is but a record of the honoring and dishonoring of God, and that only those who honor God will ultimately stand.** "... Those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam 2:30b).

**Truth-speakers have a strong reliance upon the power of God's Word to do God's will.** "Is not My word like fire?" declares the LORD, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock?" (Jer 23:29).

*Truth-speakers know that the proclamation of God’s truth often involves a crossroads or turning point for the listener.* When the Word is spoken into a believer’s life, the Lord is calling for ongoing repentance through which our affections and will are repeatedly conformed to God’s truth. The progress and spiritual well-being of ourselves and our listeners are bound up in ongoing repentance. The better we understand this, the more willing we will be to speak God’s truth without fear.

*The Apostle Paul saw his role as a proclaimer of the Word of God to be a sacred trust that carried massive accountability.* What is striking about Paul’s testimony in Acts 20 is that his faithfulness was joined to the fact that he was never mute when God required him to speak the Word. **“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God”** (Acts 20:26-27).

*Timothy was to view his task of proclaiming the Word as nothing less than the very means of ensuring the salvation of his listeners.* “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1 Tim 4:16). Paul repeatedly warned Timothy against the error of allowing **timidity and neglect** to interfere with his sacred charge of teaching, preaching, and exhorting. “For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline” (2 Tim 1:7).

*APPLICATION:* We have been entrusted by God with His almighty, living, sword of truth. The sword of truth must not be allowed to remain unused like a steel blade stuck in a rusty scabbard. Those in our sphere: family, neighbors, co-workers and friends are in need of hearing the Word of truth from us. As with Timothy’s congregation, God has strategically placed us in a position to speak the truth to those around us. The means God intends to use in their salvation and sanctification is tied to our faithfulness in speaking the Word with courage.

*When considering how God had entrusted him with the Gospel, Paul saw himself as a debtor to both Jews and Greeks (Rom 1:14).* This same principle of obligation applies to us. The Lord has called us to skillfully, prayerfully, and courageously use the “sword” of truth issued to us in order to encourage, build up, reprove, exhort, instruct, equip and admonish. It will take courage to swing the sword in each of these arcs and orbs of application, but God expects nothing less from us as His disciples.

**In the body of this article, we will examine 5 biblical ways to increase our courage to speak the Word of God to one another:**

## **I. Courage to speak the Word of God comes from abiding in Christ (Jn 15:4-5).**

*The more our hope and expectations are centered in Christ, the more Christ’s cause in the church and in the world will become our cause—and the more we will build with Him.* Christ is our sphere in whom we have life, right-standing, acceptance, divine favor, bold access, and enablement. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ**” (Eph 1:3). “In Christ,” that is by virtue of our union with Him, we have everything we need for life and godliness. We could phrase it in this manner: salvation is a *relationship given* with our Lord Jesus Christ—a relationship which is enjoyed by abiding. Jesus indicates that fruitfulness is a *byproduct* of abiding in Him—abiding is diligently caring for that relationship given.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love (Jn 15:7-10).

*As we abide in Christ, we will be delivered from the fear of man (and worship of the creature).* One of the barriers to speaking the Word to one another is the fear of man—we tend to place too much emphasis on the approval of others. The approval offered by the people around us can be incredibly fickle. Christ alone loves us with immutable, unchanging love—He is our Lord to whom we owe our allegiance. Fellow sinners do not carry our worth, security, and dignity. When we mistakenly assume they do, our courage and boldness dries up. Christ alone is our “Source Person.” He alone deserves to be regarded as the unfailing channel of every resource we need. By union with Him, we have a status before God of favor, righteousness, security, and sonship (1 Cor 1:30).

*When we abide in Christ, we will find that there is power and nerve to speak the Word of God . And we will make it our ambition to please Christ first (2 Cor 5:9).* The ambition to please our Lord is filled with the eschatological hope of favorably greeting Him at His imminent return (1 Jn 2:28). **Courage is a byproduct of living to please Christ.** When Christ's approval towers over all other sources of approval, COURAGE becomes second nature. Those who live to please Christ have the reality of the judgment seat of Christ etched on to their consciousness (2 Cor 5:9-10). In essence, living to please Christ is a measure of our reverential fear of God (2 Cor 6:14-7:1).

*Those who live for Christ's approval are like Paul, continually weighing the glory to come against temporal losses (2 Cor 4:17-18).* As a consequence, their value system is constantly adjusted to heaven's standard. This involves communing with the Lord in prayer as a source of boldness: “. . . 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**” (Eph 6:19-20). Spurgeon hit the bull's eye when he said, “Compared to what my heavenly Father thinks of me, the opinions of men are like so many chirping sparrows.”

**APPLICATION: The one we strive most to please will be our primary evaluator.** In other words, the one we seek to please will always wind up evaluating our efforts at pleasing them. In effect, we are somewhat suspended upon their approval or disapproval of us. It must be Christ, for as our rightful Lord and Master, He requires our loyalty and carries our value.

*“The fear of man brings a snare” (Prov 29:25).* The fear of God and the fear of man have always been, not only incompatible, but inversely proportional to one another. The greater fear of God a man has, the less he will fear men. When by God's grace a man answers the call of true discipleship, his fear of man will be overtaken and ultimately consumed by the fear of God.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus faced “wannabe” followers who remained in bondage to the fear of man. **John 12:42-43** provides an authoritative record of these double-minded individuals. **“Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.”**

*Some might be quick to excuse the desire for human approval as simply a natural tendency that is not a serious sin.* BUT, Jesus places this illicit craving under the spotlight in **John 5:44**. In this passage He warns that the fear of man is so serious, it can keep a person from trusting God and living to the glory of God. **“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?”**

*APPLICATION:* If we are going to demonstrate courage as truth speakers, we must repent of our “addiction” to the approval of men—admit to God that we have placed the praise of men above the approval of our Heavenly Father. We need to confess that our narcissistic desire to be liked by all has often stolen our courage to speak the truth in love. “The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are bold as a lion” (Prov 28:1). This leads us to our second point of strength and courage.

## **II. Courage to speak the Word of God comes from a clear conscience (Acts 24:15-16).**

*To abide in Christ is to be controlled by the massive guilt transfer accomplished by our Lord at the cross. The clear conscience of the person who abides in Christ will show itself in courage (Acts 24:15-16).* We cannot make a penetrating application of God’s Word to those around us unless we ourselves welcome examination by God’s Word (Ps 139:23-24). Courage in speaking the Word is dependent upon a clear conscience before God and men (Acts 24:15-16).

Even one unresolved sin or lust “banging around” in the **conscience** is enough to dull the edge of our courage. Timothy’s success in proclaiming the Word with courage depended upon his maintaining a clear **conscience**. “But the goal of our instruction is love **from a pure heart and a good conscience** and a sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:5). “This command I entrust to you, Timothy, *my son*, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a **good conscience**, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith” (1 Tim 1:18-19). “. . . *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a **clear conscience**” (1 Tim 3:9).

*A clear conscience is the godly man’s tool for ministry and worship. He keeps his conscience honed, well-tuned to the Spirit, responsive, and highly educated by the gospel.* The Holy Spirit works intimately with the conscience of the believer—ever so gently urging obedience and empowering mortification of sin (Rom 8:12-13). And the Spirit never tires of showing the blood of Christ to the conscience of the penitent believer (Heb 9:14; 10:22). The diligent believer labors to have the verdict of Calvary the verdict of his conscience (“It is finished!”). Praise be to God, in Christ and His cross we have every asset necessary to maintain a clear conscience before God and man.

*Maintaining a clear conscience is inseparable from abiding in Christ.* Living a ‘sin-judged’ life is central to abiding in Christ. This life of unbroken fellowship with the Lord is described in John’s first epistle. “But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7). When we walk in the light, our steps are guided by His Word, and if we do sin, we immediately say the same thing about that sin as God does. We confess it and forsake it and enjoy ongoing communion with the Lord.

In order for us to exercise courage, the blood of the Son of God must be the loudest voice in our **conscience**. In order for God’s justice at the cross to be believed and reckoned so as to silence the Accuser, we must habitually be mortifying sin by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:12-14).

**APPLICATION:** The same man (Peter) who turned coward when questioned by a servant girl preached the Pentecost sermon less than two months later. The Apostle Peter's radical move from fear to courage, was the result of two factors. First, he had been with Jesus. ***“Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus”*** (Acts 4:13). Remember, Peter after his failure had resigned himself to go back to fishing, but Christ re-commissioned Peter (Jn 21:15-17) ***Do you love Me? Tend My lambs.*** Second, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. ***“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers and elders of the people. . .’”*** (Acts 4:8).

We've seen in these first two points that the gospel believed, fed upon, and obeyed will enter into our conversations and as a result will build up our brothers and sisters and will produce a supernatural unity in the body of Christ.

Part Two of this article (Points 3-5) will be in next issue of Article of the Month