

Boldness— Improper and Proper

*“Now when they
saw the boldness of
Peter and John,
and perceived that
they were
unlearned and
ignorant men, they
 marvelled; and
they took
knowledge of them,
that they had been
with Jesus.”
—Acts 4:13*

NUMEROUS DEFINITIONS

are provided in Webster’s Dictionary for the word “boldness.” One is “the trait of being willing to undertake things that involve risk or danger.” Another is “the quality of standing out strongly and distinctly.” A third definition is “impudent aggressiveness,” that is, aggressiveness with contempt and disregard

toward others. It is clear from these definitions that boldness is often a quality which most would no doubt agree should be avoided. Yet, in other ways it is a trait that can be found to be noble and praiseworthy.

In today’s world, there is often much controversy as to proper versus improper boldness. A business may proclaim its success in reaching a certain level

of achievement, and with seemingly proper boldness, state that this was only possible due to the dedication of its workers. On the other hand, the workers may feel that the company was improperly bold during the year in that they did not fairly compensate those who labored to bring the desired success.

An athlete may aggressively train, pushing himself so that he can boldly perform beyond the ordinary on behalf of his team. If he is successful, his boldness is seen not only as admirable, but as an elemental requirement of his team's success. If, however, he is injured during training, or as a result of his bold actions on the field of play, all are left to wonder as to whether a less risky approach would have been wiser.

Perhaps an even more challenging example is the person who believes he must stand up boldly for a certain cause or principle. Some of those who view his actions, and who are in sympathy with his cause, will no doubt praise his boldness. Others, who may vehemently disagree, will ridicule, condemn, or even openly disparage him for what he believes. Still others, who perhaps do not have strong feelings one way or the other on a particular matter, may view the person's boldness as simply a desire to get attention.

Many other examples might be put forth to illustrate the fact that it is often not easy to determine whether boldness is proper or improper, desirable or undesirable. Like so many other challenging questions we may encounter in our lives, we are helped greatly by looking at the Scriptural testimony concerning the subject of boldness—both improper and

proper. As we do so, it becomes clear that both have been part of man's experience down through the ages.

BOLDNESS TO BE LIKE GOD

It should not surprise us that improper boldness began with Lucifer. Although created perfect, and called "the son of the morning," he turned against God, and did so with great boldness. He said in his heart, "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." —Isa. 14:12-14

These words concerning the fall of Lucifer into the depths of sin provide us a sure cause for improper boldness. With Satan, it was his desire to be like God. Whether he thought he could "share" in the position of the Almighty, or wrest it from him out rightly, we cannot be sure. With either possibility, however, the great Adversary violated one of the most cardinal qualities of the Creator. He is the one true and living God, and will not share that position with another being.

Note these words: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. ... for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God." "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." "The Lord our God is one Lord. ... and there is none other but he." "There is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things." (Exod. 20:3,5; Isa. 42:8; Mark 12:29,32; I Cor. 8:6) Thus we see that any thought, desire, or action which attempts to lessen the supreme, singular glory and honor of

God would constitute boldness of a most improper kind.

BOLDNESS TO DENY GOD'S WORD AND LIE

When Satan later presented himself to Eve in the garden, he once again used great boldness. Although acknowledging God's warning to our first parents as to the one tree of which they were forbidden to eat, he directly contradicted the words, "in the day of thine eating of it—dying thou dost die." (Gen. 2:17, *Young's Literal Translation*) Rather, through the serpent, Satan declared, "ye shall not surely die."—Gen. 3:4

Here, improper boldness was demonstrated in two abominable ways. First, there was the outright contradiction of God's word to our first parents. Second, there was the replacement of that word with a lie. This combination of methods has been a formidable tool of the Adversary all down through the ages. He boldly denies the sure word of God, and then seeks to replace it with falsehoods and lies.

The Apostle Peter wrote that, in the Bible, we have God's "sure word of prophecy," and none of it "is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not ... by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Pet. 1:19-21) Any attempt to deny the Word of truth by removing or altering its teachings is a boldness entirely unacceptable in the light of the harmonious and reasonable plans and purposes of God.

TEMPTATIONS TO IMPROPER BOLDNESS

Following Jesus' baptism, he was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for a period of forty days. During that time he learned many of the details of

the mission which lay before him. Satan also took advantage of this time and presented various temptations to the Master. In each of these, the Adversary presented the opportunity for Jesus to act boldly, and seemingly in harmony with God's Word.

In the first temptation, Satan suggested that Jesus boldly use his miracle-working power to turn stones into bread. After all, he was hungry, and the strength derived from the bread would serve him well as he began his ministry. Jesus, however, knew it would be wrong to exercise God's power for his own fleshly benefit. He quoted the words of God to Moses, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."—Matt. 4:2-4; Deut. 8:3

Satan then, perhaps through a mental picture of some kind, proposed that Jesus go to the pinnacle of Israel's Temple, cast himself off, and then rely on God's angelic hosts to save his life. Satan even quoted the Scripture, "He shall give his angels charge over thee, ... lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." (Ps. 91:11,12) What a bold exhibition of Jesus' faith, and of God's power, would be thus demonstrated to all the people of the city! Here again, though, Jesus knew that this kind of boldness was wrong. He responded, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."—Matt. 4:5-7; Deut. 6:16

The third temptation presented to our Lord also was an enticement to boldness of action. Satan showed Jesus, again in mental vision, all the kingdoms of the world, and offered to give dominion over them to him. This would be, Satan no doubt suggested, in full harmony with God's plan to set up a kingdom with Jesus as its ruler. There was just

one catch. Jesus must fall down and worship the devil. This enticement to assume kingdom rulership would have to be based on the unthinkable treachery of bowing down to the arch-enemy of God. Jesus was not tricked into such traitorous boldness. He knew it was not then time for his kingdom to be established, and even more than this, it would never enter his mind to bow down to any being other than his Heavenly Father. “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve,” was Jesus’ immediate and bold response.—Matt. 4:8-10

PROPER BOLDNESS

The word “bold” is found only once in the *King James Version* of the Old Testament. The wise man Solomon wrote, perhaps noting the example of his father David, “The righteous are bold as a lion.” (Prov. 28:1) The Hebrew word translated “bold” in this verse means to “trust, be confident or sure.” A lion, in his natural habitat, is bold, not because of some inborn desire to hurt or destroy other less formidable animals. Rather, he is bold in the sense that, since birth, he has been taught various techniques and developed certain abilities by which he can survive with confidence in the environment with which he is surrounded. Similarly, the righteous are bold, as the result of proper learning and training in the Lord’s Word, and also by way of experience.

If God speaks in the Old Testament of boldness as a quality possessed by his righteous people, we may be sure the same is true of those in the New Testament. Proper boldness is to be striven for by those who in this age have been drawn by the Father to Jesus as their Redeemer. (John 6:44) Boldness in

righteousness should be a daily goal of those that have consecrated themselves fully to God, who are justified through faith in the ransom, begotten of the Holy Spirit, and have become New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

OUR LORD'S EXAMPLE

Proper boldness must be balanced with meekness, humility of heart, and a resolute desire to submit to the Father's will. All of these were possessed in a superlative degree by Jesus. He did not recklessly endanger his life as he sought to go forward in the work the Father had given him to do. He did not fail to take into consideration the dangers and difficulties of the way, but he rested in full assurance of faith in the Father's wisdom, power and will. We should follow the example of our Master, and lay claim to the many assurances given in the Scriptures of God's providential care over his people. We should be inspired by such words as, "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them," yet at the same time realize that the promised deliverance may be through difficult circumstances, if that be the Lord's will.—Ps. 34:7

At no time during the three and one-half years of his ministry did Jesus show the least sign of fear, or lack of confidence in what was written concerning him. He was both humble and bold in doing his Father's will, and in bringing to completion the work he had been given to do. We should not consider that there was a lack of boldness or courage when our Lord prayed in Gethsemane, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." (Matt. 26:39) He

knew that his course was very near its end, and that he had but a few hours more to wait before he was to experience the dreadful ordeal of crucifixion.

It seems clear, however, that the cup, or experience, from which Jesus prayed to be spared, was not his crucifixion, since he had come into the world to die as man's Redeemer. He also had to experience the curse of the Law. As Paul points out, crucifixion was a curse: "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."—Deut. 21:22,23; Acts 5:30; Gal. 3:13

It has been suggested, that at the time of the Gethsemane experience, Jesus knew that his continued faithfulness, even in the dark hours that were before him, was critical, and he desired some assurance that, up to that point, all had been done according to his Father's will. He knew that if he had come short, even in the smallest particular, he would not be counted faithful as the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) This reverential concern and sense of the responsibility resting on him motivated him to pray earnestly that in some way he might be reassured that all was well.

The Scriptures indicate that Jesus' prayer was answered. Luke records, immediately following his petition, "There appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him." (Luke 22:43) Later, the Apostle Paul wrote, with reference to this experience, that Jesus "offered up prayers and appeals with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his devotion to God." (Heb. 5:7, *International Standard Version*) Thus, Jesus received assurance that up to this time he had done all things faithfully, and the "cup" of uncertainty was removed. With trust and confidence,

he was now prepared to meet his greatest and most crucial experience with humble boldness.

BOLDNESS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

The quality of boldness, or courage, begotten of faithful trust, is repeatedly shown in the New Testament as one of the special characteristics of the Early Church, and especially of the Apostles of Jesus. They were given the privilege of continuing the work the Lord had begun. He said to them: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."—John 20:21

In the Book of Acts, we are provided a record of the beginning of the great work of taking out "a people for his name" to be the bride of Christ. (Acts 15:14) In these accounts, we are repeatedly told of the boldness the early disciples manifested in their faithful proclamation of this great salvation. (Acts 4:19,20; 14:3-7; 18:24-26; 19:6-8) We note in his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul expresses his earnest desire for more of this special boldness of spirit. He asks them to pray for him with "perseverance and supplication," "that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel."—Eph. 6:18,19

Paul does not intend to convey that this message which he delighted to proclaim with boldness was something very difficult to grasp and understand—a great mystery. The Greek word translated mystery means "secret." It is kept secret or hidden for a time, and then is revealed, made plain, and is therefore no longer a mystery. In the outworking of God's plan throughout the ages, important truths for a time are kept secret. When uncovered they are no longer mysteries, but simple and easy to understand.

We know that the mystery Paul spoke of in his letter to the brethren at Ephesus is that feature of the Gospel message which discloses that the Messiah, the Christ, as God's anointed, is not a single individual, but a company of which Jesus is the Head. "As the body is one, and hath many members, ... so also is Christ." "This is a great mystery: ... I speak concerning Christ and the church." (I Cor. 12:12; Eph. 5:32) This Christ class, for so long a mystery to most, will be revealed to all mankind, and will bless all the families of the earth with salvation from sin and death.

BOLDNESS IN PROCLAIMING THE MESSAGE

Such a wonderful message should be proclaimed boldly to all who have an ear to hear. Paul, as a prisoner in Rome, wrote to his beloved brethren in Philippi along these lines. Years before he had preached the Word to them with blessed results. (Acts 16:10-40) He told them how the same boldness, confidence and love of the Gospel had caused the Lord to bless his message to many in Rome. He writes, "I want you to know ... that what has happened to me has actually caused the gospel to advance. As a result, it has become clear to the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that I am in prison for preaching about the Messiah. Moreover, because of my imprisonment the Lord has caused most of the brothers to become confident to speak God's word more boldly and courageously than ever before."—Phil. 1:12-14, *ISV*

Paul's faithfulness in proclaiming his Master's message, whatever the consequences to himself, had inspired many of the brethren to similar boldness

and faithfulness. Because he continually shed forth the light of truth to others, they also were letting their light shine to the glory of their Master. In this way of mutual boldness and support, the Lord richly blessed the results of their efforts.

BOLDNESS IN PRAYER

The Scriptures exhort, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16) We note that in addition to manifesting boldness in proclaiming the Lord’s message, we must be bold—full of humble confidence—to take advantage of all the means of God’s grace. This especially includes that which is here mentioned, that we should have boldness in prayer.

It is possible that, at times, on account of weaknesses or failure, we might hesitate to draw near to God to ask for forgiveness, or to pray for help that weaknesses might be overcome. This is doubtless a condition into which the great Adversary, if possible, would endeavor to lead us. At such times, we need more than ever to go to the throne of grace to obtain the mercy provided in Christ, whose merit “cleanseth us from all sin.”—I John 1:7

BOLDNESS IN THE LIVING WAY

Later in the Book of Hebrews, Paul tells us that we should have “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us.” Therefore, he continues, “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” (Heb. 10:19-22) We should, indeed, have full assurance of faith regarding the new and living way to life that has been opened up

by our great High Priest, Jesus. It is not a way such as it was under the Law Covenant, which only brought condemnation, but a way made possible by him who “should taste death for every man,” and who has now appeared “in the presence of God for us,” and who “ever liveth to make intercession” for “them which are in Christ Jesus.”—Heb. 2:9; 7:25; 9:24; Rom. 8:1

If at any time we feel we are failing to take advantage of the means and steps of grace, by not coming with boldness, with confidence, to the throne of grace, we should remember that the Lord knows all about us, our weaknesses, our failures, better than we know them ourselves. “He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” (Ps. 103:14) We should remember too, that it was the humble publican, realizing his need for God’s mercy, who was more acceptable than the self-confident Pharisee, who listed for God his righteous acts.—Luke 18:10-14

BOLDNESS IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

Finally, the Apostle John speaks of having boldness in the day of judgment. He says, “We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment.” (I John 4:16,17) John’s statement reminds us that the Gospel Age is the church’s day of judgment, the time when she is on trial for life. It would be surely true to say that we could not pass our trial successfully, could not be pleasing to the Lord and enjoy his approval, without confidence in his

goodness, and to have “known and believed the love that God hath to us.”

If a child loves his father very much he has confidence in his kindly providences, and even in his disciplinary treatment. These are intended for his good. Thus, John indicates that if the love of God has been perfected, or made complete, in us, we shall have full confidence in the one who has placed us on trial for life, and who is judging us, not according to “man’s judgment,” but according to the “righteous judgment of God.”—I Cor. 4:3; II Thess. 1:5

Let us note one more New Testament example of boldness, which is given in the account of an occurrence only a few days after Pentecost, and is contained in the words of our opening text. The faithful and very forceful witness of the Master was still fresh in the minds of the Jewish leaders, and was emphasized by Peter’s statement in the previous verse, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” As the elders of Israel noted the boldness of the Apostle’s words, they marveled, even acknowledging the fact that these “unlearned and ignorant men” had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:12,13) May it likewise be said of us concerning our words and actions in the cause of Christ, that we too have “been with Jesus,” learned of him, and are keeping near to him with humble boldness, confidence and courage. ■

*“Make me understand the way of Your precepts,
So I will meditate on Your wonders.”*

—Psalm 119:27,

New American Standard Bible