

# Being Bold in the Lord

Rev. W. Bruinsma

As most of you, I was born and raised in a typical Protestant Reformed family. I was a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church (now Crete) and attended the Protestant Reformed grade school. We did not have our own high school yet, so my parents sent me to the local Christian high school. There I entered into the normal debates over common grace, predestination, Christ's love for everyone, and so on. I was convicted of what I believed. As a result, I was involved in arguing right doctrine as opposed to wrong doctrine. Now, I suppose that was a form of witnessing, but certainly not the type of which I wish to address in this speech. While attending pre-seminary and seminary I was thoroughly trained in the Reformed truth. I learned to love and appreciate more what God had given by his grace to us as churches and to me as an individual. The first few years of my ministry were spent in Faith Church in Jenison, MI. I was busy as a young pastor in the affairs of the church and for that reason spent little time speaking to others outside of the church about God's word.

After almost six years in Faith church I took the call to be missionary in Jamaica. When my family and I made the move to this island I was confronted with something for the first time. These people knew nothing of the scripture, much less the Reformed faith. The way of life that characterized many of the people with whom I worked revealed a lack of faith and very little knowledge of the word of God and his covenant. There was little marriage, lots of fornication, no family life, and as a result no church life. It was a matriarchal society. Wow! Where does one start? With witnessing! Yes, I preached every week in one of the little churches. But what was

required of me was to sit down and speak one on one or in small groups with the people in Jamaica. Just speak with them of the wonderful works of God. No debates over the intricacies of Reformed truth—just a plain and simple witness to the truth.

That was hard since I really had little experience in this whole area. We Reformed, Dutch people are not very outgoing, to say the least! Often we take the path of least resistance, that is, not stepping outside the group of friends we have and carrying on a conversation with others. Then to add to that conversation speaking about our faith, our salvation in Christ, our place in God's fellowship and covenant? We have a hard enough time discussing that with each other in our young peoples societies, much less speaking of our faith to one who is not a friend or fellow church member. I was forced to do that while in Jamaica. It was a good learning experience for me. Witnessing: speaking to those who are not of the faith about the wonderful works of God. Who would be so bold to do this?

Yet, this is the calling of the church and her members. We are called to testify to others of the gospel of grace. This witness must not only be given by the church institute through the preaching and mission work, but it is the calling of every believer. We must be willing at all times to give a reason for the hope that dwells in us. To do that takes the boldness and confidence of faith. But it also takes zeal and enthusiasm inspired by our own salvation.

### **The Believer's Zeal**

It must have taken guts for the apostle Paul to sit down with a group of learned philosophers at Mars Hill in Athens. When Paul entered this city we read that his spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city given over to idolatry. What did he do? He disputed with the Jews in the synagogue there. But he also witnessed in the marketplace concerning Christ and his

resurrection. This witness of Paul drew the attention of the Stoics and Epicureans who encountered him and brought him to the place where men spent their day discussing philosophy. There Paul boldly related to these men the Christian faith. That, I say, took guts! What would motivate Paul to do this? Why didn't he shy away and just simply stay close-lipped about what he believed? Paul answers this question in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Can we who live in these last days say that of the faith God has worked in our hearts? Paul was passionate about what he believed. He was genuinely zealous. He loved the gospel of Christ! It was the very power unto his own salvation. It is what had delivered him out of the hold that sin and unbelief had on him. His zeal for the gospel empowered him to speak to others of what he believed. When you or I are passionate about something we talk about it all the time: a new car, basketball, a new girlfriend or boyfriend. The subject is always on our lips. That we could be so passionate about what we believe! What we believe is not just a set of doctrines that our churches maintain as true, so we do too. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not mere abstract doctrine that we hear about on Sunday but the moment we are out of church our interests turn elsewhere. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not something we learn about in catechism and reluctantly are forced to talk about in young people's society. The gospel of Jesus Christ is life! Your life and mine. Consider for a few moments with me what the gospel of Christ is.

My mother used to sing to me an old-time hymn when I was small: "Count your blessings name them one by one, count your many blessings see what God has done." When is the last time we thought about the many spiritual blessings we have received in Christ? We have been saved! Saved from what? We have been saved from the horrible corruption of sin. The

wicked of this world are blind spiritually. Because they do not know God and Jesus Christ they walk about in the corruption of their sin. They act happy, but they are miserable because they cannot find rest to their souls! They find temporary fixes to their misery in drugs, alcohol, wild dancing, and illicit sex. Their goals and direction in life are so shallow, earthly, and empty. All is vanity!

Through salvation in Christ Jesus we have been delivered from that blindness and darkness of heart and soul. By God's grace we have discovered a better life—a life filled with joy, peace and holiness. And except for the few of us who might be as dogs returning to their vomit, we have been given joy and direction in this life that the unbeliever cannot find! And more—we have been saved from an eternity in hell too! Ever think of that? We deserve to die—everlastingly! We deserve to be punished for our sins against God. But through the precious blood of Jesus Christ shed for us on the cross we have been delivered from the wrath of God. We are righteous in the blood of Christ. To know that is of great relief too.

Yet there is still more: not only have we been saved but we have been given so much by God in his grace. Because of Christ's work we have been reconciled to God. We have been adopted to be his very own children. Can we begin to fathom the depths of our relationship with God? We are his children whom he loves. He gives us all things for Christ's sake. We belong to the sovereign God of heaven and earth who controls all things. If he is for us nothing in this life can be against us. He uses everything to our profit. God has also given us a place in his church. In the church we find safety and security. We have a place to grow up and be nurtured. We have office bearers who care for our needs. We have family and friends. Count your blessings, name them one by one! What a wealth is ours!

Now some in the church may not think all that much about these marvelous gifts. But the believing young person deeply appreciates what God has done for him. And that gratitude is incentive to speak to others of what God has done for us. I love Psalm 66: "Come hear all ye that fear the Lord, while I with grateful heart record what God has done for me. I cried to him in deep distress, and now his wondrous grace confess, for he has set me free!" I bubble over with gratitude! I am willing to speak about God's wondrous grace because it is my passion. It is more important than anything else in my life! God is my Father! I love him. Let me tell you what God has done for me! That is witnessing. Nothing else can define it. It is speaking to others of the wonderful works of God.

When I see the sad condition of this world and those around me, my heart is glad for what God has done for me. I could be lost in that sin! I could be damned to an eternity in hell! But God has delivered me. And maybe God will deliver that unbelieving neighbor too. And maybe, just maybe, he might use my witness to do so. I do not know, of course, unless I enthusiastically tell my neighbor of what God has done for me. In thankfulness Paul was bold in the Lord to speak of Jesus and the resurrection. So also must we be bold.

### **The Believer's Preparedness.**

But that is easier said than done, you might say. I know! It is for me too. First of all, the wicked world is intimidating! People are easily offended and are quick in anger to tear into a person when that person attempts to share anything personal about what they believe. Then I am tempted to come up with the excuse, "Well, why cast your pearls before swine?" The wicked people of this world are not worthy of hearing my testimony of what God has done for me. But wait! Am I worthy of my salvation? Young people, are we in ourselves more worthy than the unbeliever? By God's grace (unmerited favor) alone we are believers! We were and are as

unworthy in ourselves as that unbelieving man or woman. But I know the fear. The wicked are intimidating. When we speak of our faith the unbeliever often times responds by mocking us.

There is another fear that also might keep us from speaking to others about what we believe: we feel we are not knowledgeable enough. Perhaps when I am speaking to others about what I believe someone will argue with me and I will not be able to defend the truth properly. I will not be able to out-argue the other person and then I will bring shame on myself and what I believe. Young people, every one of you has already been thoroughly trained in the doctrines of the faith. You have plenty of knowledge in the Old and New Testaments and in the truths of scripture. Perhaps we have not been taught to share it properly with others, but we do have the knowledge. Most people we meet today are either unchurched or attend a church that does not teach them the objective knowledge of the word of God. Why fear that we do not know enough? We have a whole arsenal of truth to draw from. We are prepared!

Being fully prepared, we must simply speak. This is the point of Jesus in his sermon on the mount in Matthew 5. You are the light of the world! You are lights that shine forth with the blessedness of salvation! “This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine! Hide it under a bushel—no!” You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its savor, if your salvation is not spoken of to others it is thenceforth good for nothing but to be thrown away. Jesus’ point is: he will use his people to witness to unbelievers of the wonderful works of God. God grant us that boldness! Certainly we need that in these last days. I have discovered in my work that our land is in woeful straits. The knowledge of God is gone. The knowledge of Christ is gone. The need for salvation is ignored. How important that we zealously witness of what God has done for us! People need to see and hear that God has saved us and freely given us a place in his church. There are very few who are able to fill that need any more today— precious few. How urgent is

the need for us to testify of our faith to others perchance God has yet chosen to save by means of our witness.

### **The Believer's Witness**

What then must be the content of our witness? What must we say? I'll answer that question by proposing three statements of what witnessing is not. First of all, a person's witness to others is not mechanical. I am not going to pass on to you a script of what your conversation with others must be. That would be the easy way. I am not going to give you a few patent phrases to use in order to witness to someone else. That being said, however, I also do not believe that to be a good witness we need to be able to walk up to a stranger on the street and start talking with him about Jesus. We can do that, of course. There is nothing wrong with that. But a more effective witness is left when we speak to someone we know: a neighbor, a fellow worker, or a person who asks us of our faith. Then our witness is not superficial but much more meaningful. This will also determine what our witness will be. The subject we address when witnessing will be determined by the occasion and circumstances in which we find ourselves. It will be natural. Perhaps at college someone will want to talk to us about creation versus evolution. Others will want to talk to us about our holy lives. Then we can give witness to Jesus Christ and his salvation. Some will want to talk about membership in the church. Again, this leads us to the cross. Some will want to discuss a problem they are having: a severe trial or affliction or the terminal illness or death of a loved one. Still others will want to talk about their family difficulties or family life: marriage or the raising of their children. All these make for excellent opportunities to speak to them of the wonderful works of God, to speak with them about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Mind you, we need to have our eyes open for the opportunity.

Most often when the opportunity arises we avoid it because we are either afraid or ashamed of the gospel. There are more opportunities that arise than we wish to admit.

Second, our witness need not be profound. We do not have to relate the dogmatical definitions of predestination, justification, God's attributes, and so on. These issues may come up but we are not out to impress someone with our knowledge. Our witness is not proud but humble. And it is simple. A simple explanation is all that is necessary.

Third, witnessing is not winning an argument or debate. It is not being able to out-argue someone else. Sometimes we think that is what witnessing is all about: winning an argument. Then we can walk away, shine our knuckles, and be satisfied that we were an effective witness. Not really. We have only served to offend rather than to draw others to the gospel. We must be willing to listen and give a humble answer without leaving the impression that we are in any way superior to those with whom we speak.

May God bless you, young people, by means of the witness you leave with others. May you as covenant young people be a light on a hill that cannot be hid. And may we together be a blessing that draws others to Christ.

\*Rev. Bruinsma is a pastor at Pittsburgh Protestant Reformed Church in Pittsburgh, PA

Originally Published in:

Vol 76 No 10 October 2017