

Title: ALWAYS BE OF GOOD COURAGE, 2 CORINTHIANS 5:6.  
(Chatham, NJ; 06/14/09, AM) [Pc – Topical]

Theme: Despite the presence and even increase of evil we have good reason to be filled with courage.

Purpose: To demonstrate how God's plan to grow the Kingdom in the midst of an evil generation emboldens Christians with courage.

Introduction:

1. Whereas some translations use the word confident in 2 Corinthians 5:6 & 8, the word in Greek is also the word for courage. I think that translation is what we need.
2. Often the Apostle Paul finds himself in situations that try his courage and confidence: in prison in Philippians, in dire straits in 2 Cor. 1, and enduring a shipwreck in Acts.
3. Let's set this in an even larger context in order to gain the same perspective and "always be of good courage."

I. In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul warns of trouble ahead.

A. 1 Tim. 4:1.

1. In later times some will depart from the faith.
2. He warns Timothy that they will be susceptible to deceit by evil spirits and insincere liars.
3. Bold-faced lies come from "seared consciences."

B. 2 Tim. 3:1 – difficulties ahead in the last days.

1. The trouble begins with love of self.
2. And contrasts with "not lovers of God."
3. Everything in between reads like a list of satanic virtues.
4. Their hypocrisy (5) will be open for all to see (9).

C. 2 Tim. 4: 3-4, more trouble for the future.

1. Itching ears hear only what they have already decided to believe.
2. God's teachings are not suited to satisfy their passions (3).
3. Their emotions, passions, and sinful desires determine truth.
4. Myths are simply an outgrowth of desire run amok.

D. Not one of these passages provides a time frame. Perhaps today; perhaps not.

1. Jesus warned the disciples that the world would always hate them.
2. The world still hates Christ's followers. They hate the truth.
3. This requires courage and confidence in all of us.

II. Reasons for Faithlessness Today.

A. Prosperity.

1. Moses warned that prosperity can breed faithlessness, Deut. 8:11-14.
2. That the poor have been gifted with faith (James 2:5) should not surprise us.
3. Even today it is a well-known observance that the wealthy tend to depend on themselves and their wealth and lack any real faith.
4. Maybe the economic downturn will serve to highlight faith.

B. Dependence on government.

1. Political scientists at U. of Wash. discovered the inverse relationship between state welfare spending and religiosity (see photocopy).
2. It is unclear which comes first, but the connection is demonstrable.
3. It was faithlessness that prompted Israel to ask for a king, 1 Sam. 8:7.
4. They persisted despite the warnings, 8:10-18.
5. By the fourth administration, the government had become a burden: the Kingdom split as a result of it under Rehoboam, 1 Kings 12:14.

C. Purity and self-control are portrayed with mockery and scorn.

1. See especially 2 Timothy 3:1ff.
2. Under the guise of freeing us from taboos there are fewer social stigmas for violating certain moral rules.
3. To some it doesn't even matter that sexually transmitted diseases, abortion, and other societal ills are a result of breaking down those prohibitions.
4. Purity is an object of ridicule, and this is their only weapon since arguments for sexual license are nothing more than expressions of their own personal desires.

III. In the larger New Testament context we can gain courage from the Parables of the Growing Seed and the Mustard Seed, Mark 4:26-32.

A. The power to set things right resides with God and in the growth of his Kingdom.

1. The seed grows without man's help.
2. The small seed of mustard grows large enough to provide shelter.
3. Elijah had to learn that God was at work. (Explain.)
4. Israel experienced the grace of God: despite their demand for a king, God still engineered his plan to send the Messiah.
5. Though the seeds of God's word, his truths and teachings, may seem insignificant in world affairs, THEY AREN'T!

B. The Kingdom is at work...sometimes invisibly.

1. The media recently trumpeted the demise of Christianity in this country by noting statistics that demonstrated a higher number of people claiming no religion and smaller number claiming no church affiliation.
2. To such wishful thinking I say two things: first, as Mark Twain said of the rumors about his demise, "The report of my death was an exaggeration," second, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."
3. A recent article in *World*, 6/20/09, challenged this (<http://www.worldmag.com/articles/15477>). Related books about how a revival is now in progress may demonstrate a significant trend. (See Shield's quote, p. 43.)
4. This is an interesting quote, "The unaffiliated has one of the smallest retention rates of any major religious group."
5. One example is noted British author and former atheist, A. N. Wilson. (See quotes.)

C. Our struggles are evidence of God's activity.

1. 2 Thess. 1:4-5, the struggles of the church in Thessalonica.
2. Mt. 5:11, lies about Christianity are evidence of its authenticity.

Conclusion: Be of good courage for God is at work. Do good; sow the seed; have faith.