

## **This Thing Called Courage**

### **Focusing on Biblical Integrity**

Barbara Buzzard

Is it possible that one might have been a church member for years and yet never have been challenged on the subject of courage – which is to say that it is *required* for Christians. Do churches in general teach about courage? Do they focus on it, talk about it, and model it as an essential (what we hear as a “salvation issue”)? To ignore this requirement is to our peril and a luxury we don’t have.

Anthony and I have had an interesting and unique vantage point for many years. We have watched ‘the faith’ be disturbed by claims of ‘kingdom now,’ by amillennialism, by preterism, by distortions of God’s character such as Calvinism and once saved, always saved. We have watched as the faith is watered down by omitting the importance of the atonement and the virgin birth. This is very close to home as we have watched as churches become Laodicean, trying our best to warn but not being listened to. Laodicean with its lukewarm approach makes people unable to express outrage and therefore makes you a partner in crime and dangerous. We have watched as church officials have failed their people in not having the courage to stand and be counted. *We have watched as the model of their silence became the silence of others.*

We have seen (watched helplessly) hugely promising individuals (who could have been good seed living out the parable of the sower) wilting with the pressures, and choosing to go with the flow to avoid causing trouble and giving up the fight just because it is too hard. Some have even contrived new vocabulary so as to “fit in” and call themselves ‘biblical trinitarians.’

I chose to speak about courage not because I imagine that I have it, but because I am examining myself. I am convinced of the value of asking hard, very hard questions. We have seen where courage is *not*: it is not in the desire to be part of the evangelical camp, to be respected. The hankering after inclusion is dangerous. Francis Schaeffer tried to warn us in his book, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*. Is no one reading/thinking? What an incredibly important lesson for us all to not call evil things good and good things evil.<sup>1</sup> Courage is not in keeping things together – maintaining the status quo and peace at all costs. We have been told that “my pastor is bought and paid for,” by which it is meant that the pastor will not go against what his elders instruct him either to say or *not* say, nor will he preach the truth if it is not acceptable to them. This is an enormous tragedy where pastors trade their principles for the approval of men. Courage is most certainly *not* – in keeping your head down. I am confident that Jesus would not approve of trudging through life with your head down. According to Scripture we enter through the narrow gate<sup>2</sup> but some are continually and persistently and aggressively trying to widen that gate. There is no widening of that narrow gate allowed biblically, even though we are bombarded by efforts to be inclusive.

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<sup>1</sup> Prov. 17:15 and several others

<sup>2</sup> Mat. 7:13

Courage is NOT: in any church that refuses to speak against the horror of abortion; it is *not* in refusing to have your brother's back. It is not being a "yes man." It is not self-serving, self-protecting of one's reputation, preserving prestige and respect at all costs. It is not being satisfied with ignorance and it is not in overlooking sin and dishonesty in order to protect the home turf.

One of the very dangerous lies popular among believers is to say or think that if your church or pastor were wrong – God would correct him/them. This is agonizing because as I understand it – that is just NOT how God works. First of all, that thinking would make the pastor near-to-perfect, always to be corrected by God. Secondly, it removes the onus from you as to your responsibility as a Berean to check to see if the preaching is correct. "Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily..."<sup>3</sup> In other words, we find throughout Scripture that judgment is delayed and therefore we cannot deduce that because no judgment was carried out – the behavior was correct or acceptable. As per Solomon in Ecc. 3:17: "In due season God will judge everyone, both good and bad, for all their deeds." And v. 18: "God allows people to continue in their sinful ways so he can test them..."

Another dangerous detour which is being pressed upon us by all sides is that of faux or false compassion. This has come into vogue – but is misleading as it is in fact *devoid* of compassion. True compassion would entail that we label sin as sin and help the sinner to overcome and confront it. This popular but misnamed compassion which is to be found everywhere is just *indifference by another name*. It allows us and teaches us to accept all lifestyles instead of actually helping a sinner to repent; it frees us of any responsibility to help others face Scriptural truth. It is therefore cowardice. And it actually does harm to one caught in the web of sin because it does not help him out of it. True compassion never enables; it is not passive. True compassion is not an enemy of Truth, nor is it a substitute for it.

Courage is rare, exceedingly rare. Do we not have a predisposition towards cowardice? But that is a freedom that we do not have as Christians. Being timid in the faith is not an option. Being part of the herd is not an option. Choosing not to grow in the faith is not an option. Perhaps we are all at heart cowards. *Why do we refer to cowards as chickens?* Could it be because of their halting way of walking? "How long will you go limping [halting] with two different opinions." And we do the same thing – Scripture calls it shrinking. Heb. 10:38b: "My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back." It is most sobering that ***cowards are the first to be thrown into the lake of fire*** (Rev. 21:8). God is not mocked nor is he fooled. He hates cowardice and so should we. Lange's Commentary refers to all of the lost as cowards. Could it be one of Satan's master coups to delude us as to the non-requirement of courage? I was so very surprised to find that the KJV does not even have the word coward. They use words such as timid or faint-hearted.

### **Beware!**

The subtlety of evil is that it always involves lies. The lie of exclusion as to the necessity of courage is to be recognized. And, of course the most dangerous people ever to be deceived are ourselves. One of the foundational principles for maturity in the faith and for strong character is to *identify lies*. If you haven't done that, you are at risk of being deceived and we are warned

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<sup>3</sup> Ecc. 8:11a

(commanded) not to be deceived. We are encouraged to ask ourselves: is that a lie in my right hand?<sup>4</sup> Consider the following Scripture: “Do not judge others and you will not be judged.” And when you hear it, as you will hear it over and over again – ask: could that be a lie in your right hand? Jesus’ intention is that we judge rightly, not that we condemn. It is important to note that soon after giving this command Jesus spoke of casting your pearls before swine, an action which would require judgment or discernment. We do not believe in a Jesus who says one thing but does another. Therefore it is imperative that we not only understand this principle but that we teach it. This is one of the most elementary of Christian lessons; and is one of those things which will keep you in darkness until you understand it. After all – think of this: ***what kind of moral and ethical vacuum are you operating in when you refuse to judge? And even more importantly, what are the ramifications of Jesus’ advice if we misunderstand him?*** Truth should be injected into every thought, every moral view, every value system, philosophy, and every invitation to “accept Jesus.” This is not a distinctive; it is the essence of Christian behavior. Some are, in fact, even destroying the biblical judgment of God in that they portray Him as having endless tolerance. This *drift in belief* to a nonjudgmental God plays along with the wrong thinking that we mustn’t judge.<sup>5</sup> Pastor Lutzer says this: “In America today, even among evangelicals, God has been domesticated. He’s been brought down and made much more sin-friendly. Americans don’t mind saying that they believe in “God” as long as they can choose the god in whom they believe.”<sup>6</sup> This same author, felt the need to call out the hugely popular Andy Stanley, who said we need to “unhitch” our faith from the Old Testament. Stanley also apparently hosted a controversial LGBTQ conference at his church.<sup>7</sup> I find it ironic that Stanley advises us to unhitch our faith from the O.T. because one of the books that has been of such help to me this year was *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*.

Another deception popular among Christians is the prejudice against trying to correct or to persuade, against even bringing to the table theological truths and differences. We seem to have taken our stand with the philosophy promoted in the Bambi film – don’t say anything unless you say something nice. That is not sound practice for a Christian. Consider: Jesus spent most of his time persuading and correcting. Paul also named Alexander the coppersmith who did him much harm. In today’s soft religious world we are often condemned for these actions. But surely we take our cues from Jesus and not Bambi. If it is not our duty to point out faulty logic for the sake of neighbors and friends – then whose is it? Who is supposed to do this?

Sin creeps in and threatens to derail us when we least expect it. How about in the REV translation in which the following comment is made re: 1 Cor. 6:9 “The Christian who practices flagrant sin has everlasting life but will have no “inheritance” on the New Earth in the Millennial Kingdom.”<sup>8</sup> Compare with this: “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.”<sup>9</sup> One of these statements is true; one isn’t. And so we have the old ‘once saved,

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<sup>4</sup> Isa. 44:20

<sup>5</sup> Mat. 7:1

<sup>6</sup> Todd Vician, World Mag. Jan. 2025 in an interview with Erwin Lutzer, author and pastor.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Revised English Version, commentary 1 Cor. 6-9

<sup>9</sup> Hab. 1:13

always saved' lie right there in a Unitarian Bible translation! And the lying philosophy behind it I.e. it is safe to sin because we are under grace.

## **True Courage**

I understand that in biblical times the shepherd of a flock would lie down at the gate of the sheepfold once all the sheep were inside, and make himself their guardian. He makes himself the gate. Any wild animal or thief would have to deal with him first. David who was a shepherd, learned courage as he matured and said: <sup>10</sup> "I will not be shaken." And of course we have the negative shepherds: Isa. 51:16 – "They are stupid shepherds, all following their own path." Pastors who are cowards cannot be feeding and shepherding God's people. They are to be watchmen, and watchmen are never silent as to the dangers they have seen.

Note the drastic change that happens here among the disciples: "But no one had the courage to speak favorably about him in public for they were afraid of getting into trouble with the Jewish leaders."<sup>11</sup> However, in Acts Peter and John were solemnly warned by the rulers and elders in Jerusalem not to teach or to speak to anyone in Jesus' name again. And so what did they do? They asked this question: do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? Their first action when they were freed was to pray and ask God for boldness. Then they preached with boldness. A shorthand version of this account might read like this: Peter and John were warned never to speak of Jesus again, so they went out and preached about Jesus.

One of the most wonderful true stories of courage is this: People in a French village who had moved to a remote area because of religious persecution many years before – began helping refugees when the Nazis started their murderous campaign to wipe out the Jews. They had accepted and relocated thousands when the Nazi campaign intensified. A group of young people from this town decided that things were getting a bit too dangerous and that they needed a new plan. They knew full well that anyone harboring a Jew would be shot. They wrote this to the Nazi authorities: "We have learned of the frightening scenes which took place 3 weeks ago in Paris, where the French police, on order of the occupying power, arrested in their homes all the Jewish families in Paris...The fathers were torn from their families and sent to Germany. The children torn from their mothers, who underwent the same fate as their husbands...We are afraid that the measures of deportation of the Jews will soon be applied in our southern zone. We feel obliged to tell you that there are among us a certain number of Jews. But, we make no distinction between Jews and non-Jews. It is contrary to the Gospel teaching...We would try to hide them as best we could. We have Jews. You're not getting them."

And they didn't get them! This beautiful and true story was not the result of the privileged and fortunate but of the marginalized and the damaged – the underdogs who had developed the courage to resist – not for their own lives, but for the sake of others.

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 2:25

<sup>11</sup> John 7:13

## “Accepting Jesus”

The truth of it is that it is Jesus who accepts us. When the invitation from evangelicals to “accept Jesus” is made I cannot help but think, wait – wait. You make it sound as though I am ‘good to go.’ What about the fact that I must build character? That it is not easy to develop patience, and goodness and the near to impossible loving of my enemy? You didn’t tell me that. What are the conditions? You speak of the “unconditional love of God” and yet I know that one cannot go on sinning. You didn’t tell me how hard it was going to be. You didn’t tell me that I would have to come out of the world, or that the world would hate me! <sup>12</sup>That would have made it a ‘hard sell,’ and yet without *full disclosure* your invitation rings a bit hollow. You did not tell me the cost of discipleship nor did you tell me what was up ahead.

## What is up ahead?

Nothing can derail you, knock you off kilter, undermine or destroy your faith like being met with the opposite of your expectations. That is why surprise attacks are so successful. The importance of having the right framework could not be over-emphasized. We will find our most strongly held beliefs ridiculed and challenged; principles that we cherish may be derisively dismissed. But no matter how weary we may become in persuading others to see the value in what we value, we must have courage still – and persevere. The importance of the paradigm we have of the future is all important. It might even break you or make you. If we are expecting a soft landing, the inheritance of a prosperity gospel – we may be sorely deceived and crushed. John 16:1 “I have told you these things *so that* you won’t fall away. For you will be expelled from the synagogues, and the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing God a service.”

1 Cor. 4:13 – “...We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.” Here’s the thing: **We can’t be reigning with Christ and be scum at the same time!**

John 15:18 “When the world hates you, remember that it hated me before it hated you.” John 17:14 “...And the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world...”

The same scenario continues here: 2 Tim. 3:12 – “Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil people and imposters will flourish. They will go on deceiving others, and they themselves will be deceived.”

John 15:20b: “Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you.”

John 15:21 “The people of the world will hate you because you belong to me, for they don’t know God who sent me.”

Mat. 5:10 “God blesses those who are persecuted because they love God..”

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<sup>12</sup> John 17:14, Rev. 18:4

So that is a summary of what is up ahead. How does it square with popular preaching? **What is so dangerously missing is the willingness to be regarded as scum.** The good news is that our Father says: I refresh the humble and give *new courage* to those with repentant hearts.”<sup>13</sup>

### Right to Silence?!

Reason and speech are gifts from God that enable us to *think*. The failure to think through the implications of being silent may, in fact, *keep us silent*. You have the right to remain silent but, I would argue, *not as a Christian*. And here's a hard question: could faith when we silence it become not only ineffective but toxic? *We must be challenged by the insight that to remain silent in the face of evil is in itself a form of evil.*

“The true danger we face is not cataclysmic, and violent persecution, but the *slow drifting* from Truth.”<sup>14</sup> It is INDIFFERENCE! It strikes me that there is a time when opinions **MUST BE** voiced. If they are not, we are in the situation where the evils that befall us are more certainly due to good men who are silent than by bad men.

Matt Walsh in *Church of Cowards* says this: “Many of the parables of Jesus are about the sharpness of choice and decision. Wheat or weeds; sheep or goats; wise or foolish, rock or sand; God or mammon. They are full of contrasts between one kind of behavior or attitude and another. Jesus leaves no middle ground for the apathetic. Shoulder-shrugging was not an option. You followed or you walked away. The same kind of moral and spiritual starkness characterizes Deuteronomy. You either love God or you hate Him (7:9-10). Any other way of life is to hate him. *Indifference is practical hatred.* And so too the consequences of our choices are simple – blessing or curse.”<sup>15</sup> Think about what fear does: as The Message puts it: “The fear of human opinion disables.” As Scripture says, fear of man is a snare, a trap; we are trapped by what others think. And yet more than 500 times we are told in Scripture not to be afraid. Fear paralyzes, it inhibits, and it excuses us from doing what we should. Not to speak is to exclude yourself from the Great Commission.

### Taking the Sting out of the Horror

A *pagan* inscription from the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC reads like this: “When men and women enter this building, they should swear...not to participate in ...abortions...nor anything else that kills children.”<sup>16</sup> Shame on us and all feckless churches and pastors who fail to speak out against abortion and utterly fail to protect the most innocent and vulnerable. All of the pro-choice jargon that just cushions the horror of abortion is like metastasized thinking. What has happened under our noses and on our watch is the normalization of an horrific practice, the killing of innocent babies.

The main reason pastors won't speak out on the murder of babies is fear of man/loss of support. Christianity suffers from a huge disconnect in that the majority of those having abortions

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<sup>13</sup> Isa. 52:b

<sup>14</sup> Matt Walsh, *Church of Cowards*, p. 25

<sup>15</sup> Chris Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, p. 251, emphasis mine.

<sup>16</sup> WBC, This list is remarkably similar to Rev. 21:8 and 22:15.

identify as Christian! Scripture is clear on the sin of shedding innocent blood. **Scripture is clear on the sanctity of life; many Christians and many of their churches are not!**

**And consider this: not only are we stealing their right to be born the first time but we are stealing their right to be born again!**

## **Holiness – A Big Surprise**

One of the greatest gifts a parent could give his/her children is the idea/example that it is to their good that they stand apart from the crowd, to drum into their heads from early on that they are different from the rest of the world. Bear with me please - I know that this is difficult because our culture values conformity, but I believe this is a blessing with considerable impact and the sooner we realize it the better. This understanding will help us come to grips with our identity and avoid the identity crisis which so many have. Strength of character is shown by standing against the crowd. How very dangerous to be manipulated by the crowd. It was the crowd who crucified Jesus! I was surprised to find that one of the meanings of the word 'holy' is to be set apart, to be 'other,' to be different.

"The word holy, then does not mean particularly religious. What it actually does mean, essentially, is 'different.' It speaks of something or someone being distinctive, set apart and separate. It is the fundamental description of God himself precisely because he is different—utterly 'other' than anything or anyone in the created world. In many contexts in the Old Testament, the holiness of Yahweh is contrasted with the idols of the nations. Yahweh is the living God, the Holy One of Israel, the God who is utterly different."<sup>17</sup> Apartness, set-apartness, separateness - these are words descriptive of God. We know that we are to be holy as God is holy and so those same words therefore apply to us. We are to be apart, separate, separated for a specific purpose. In our pursuit of life, we must not, we dare not, adopt the attitudes and ways of those who do not reverence God. I love the Isaiah scripture which says "The LORD said to me in the strongest terms: '**Do not think like everyone else does.**'"<sup>18</sup>

"For Israel, then, being the people of Yahweh meant being different too. When God said 'You shall be holy because I, the LORD your God am holy', what it meant, colloquially, was 'You must be a different kind of people because I am a different kind of God...Israel would be a nation among other nations, but they were to be holy – i.e. *different* from the rest of the nations."<sup>19</sup>

## **Conclusion**

*We protect what we love*; if we love the Truth – we will do our best to protect it. Anthony's emphasis on 2 Thess. 2:10 – loving the truth so as to be saved – also brings into the equation this: that if we love the Truth, we will protect it. That involves action and not just passive acceptance. *We are called to bear witness to Truth*. Protecting the Truth would require that one speak frankly about: biblical matters that are being lied about.

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<sup>17</sup> *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, p. 203

<sup>18</sup> Isa. 8:11

<sup>19</sup> *Knowing Jesus*, pp. 203, 204

All the warnings and cautions in Scripture in essence say this – **don't leave Jesus!** (Incidentally – this would be nonsense for believers in Calvinism who not only couldn't leave Jesus but also who couldn't come to him in the first place!) King David put it this way: "I will not be shaken."<sup>20</sup>

There is a time to have the bold courage of a lion. Courage is a virtue which activates and energizes us and we need it desperately to please our God. The cost of obedience is nothing like the cost of disobedience.

In John 17:6 Jesus prayed fervently for his disciples. If we are his disciples – surely we are covered by those prayers. As someone said – "If I could have heard Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies." Distance should make no difference – we are covered by those generous and fervent prayers.

What about the courage of our convictions? Our convictions *do not allow us to give the same respect to both Truth and error*. Note how this rules out the inclusive thinking that is being pressed upon us. (And note that you would be required to judge rightly and that you NOT be indifferent or accepting of error.) Convictions *restrain and constrain* us to stand for what we believe. Jesus said in essence: you can do what you will to me but I am not moving. Servetus, when his life was taken said the same. And here is a hard question: is it possible that we resist the very thing that would cause us to grow? (e.g. persecution, being called or known as a heretic). *Are our convictions in line with our practices?!*

### **Jude 3**

**The bottom line is this: Cowards do not contend for the faith.** Since those are our marching orders – we must examine ourselves, correct what needs correcting, and boldly carry out our instructions. *Truth and compassion are not enemies*, nor is compassion a substitute for Truth. There is nothing for it except to do as Isaiah said: set your face like flint. (Isa. 50:7)

Courage may alter the course of human history. **Queen Esther's** example is an excellent one – if I am mocked – I am mocked; if I am scorned and ridiculed so be it. It is to the glory of God.

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<sup>20</sup> Acts 2:25