

# COURAGE/FORTITUDE: “Fear Not”— “Perfect Love Casts Out All Fear”

Josh 1:6-9; Pr 28:1; Mt 1:30, 2:10, Heb 12:3; I Jn 4:18

**I. DEFINITION:** a readiness to give one’s life for the right reason in the right way

## **II. AVOIDING EXTREMES:**

A. Inordinate Fear—Cowardice

1. Fleeing battlefield, failing to defend innocents from aggression
2. Failing to stand firm for justice, avoiding confrontations; concealing convictions, failing to declare truth; failing to refute slander; a general “faintheartedness”—caving in to pressures
3. Appeasing evildoers, aggressors—e.g. Tripoli pirates, before Jefferson acts; Chamberlain at Munich; FDR & Churchill at Yalta; Obama re Syria & Iran;

B. Irrational Risk-taking—Rashness, Daring, Recklessness

1. Risking life for wrong reasons—fame, recognition, thrills, \$\$; e.g. terrorists
2. Risking life imprudently—overwhelming odds, impossible goals,

## **III. ASSESSING COMPONENTS:**

A. Aggression (courage=brave-heart); taking initiative, acting

1. Mental preparation: confidence (hopeful trust in another’s word and help); *magnanimity* (bold vision, confidence); envisioning and bringing into being a noble endeavor—e.g. Petraeus’ surge in Iraq; church building programs; missionary exploits; godly family
2. Training: importance of **habits** in virtuous living
3. Accomplishing task: enacting plans

B. Endurance (fortitude=bearing burdens)

1. Patience: enduring discomforts, disappointments, failures, opposition
2. Perseverance: working to finish task, run race

## **IV. ILLUSTRATIONS:**

A. Physical: Life Offered and even Sacrificed

1. Professionals: soldiers, policemen, firemen
2. Parents: mothers (giving birth) & fathers (protecting)
3. Martyrs: litany of Christians: Ignatius of Antioch; Cyprian of Carthage; Bonhoeffer; Jim Elliott

B. Intellectual: Truth Upheld

1. Jesus before Pilate; Paul on trial
2. Luther at Worms; John Henry Newman
3. Norwegian teachers under Nazis; Solzhenitsyn vs. USSR

C. Moral: Doing Right Despite the Cost

1. T.S. Eliot & first wife
2. Pro-Life Stalwarts—PA senator, 1992 Democrat Convention

## FORTITUDE: “THE FORM OF EVERY VIRTUE”

“Fortitude,” C.S. Lewis wrote, “includes both kinds of courage—the kind that faces danger as well the kind that ‘sticks it out’ under pain. ‘Guts’ is perhaps the nearest modern English.” Vince Lombardy once said: “If you’re lucky enough to find a guy with a lot of smarts and a lot of heart, he’ll always come off the field first.” Whether intentionally or not, Lombardy highlighted two of the classic cardinal virtues—prudence (smarts) and courage (heart).

### DEFYING DEATH, DISARMING DISCOURAGEMENT

Fortitude frees a man from an inordinate fear of death. A courageous soldier neither flees in battle nor takes foolish risks. The courageous person willingly risks his life when the cause is just, when there is good reason. “It is for the sake of the good,” said St Thomas Aquinas, “that the brave man exposes himself to the danger of death.” Here, as with all virtues, it’s the external act, not the inner feeling, that counts.

Though we often illustrate this virtue by celebrating military heroes, Thomas Aquinas insists that mundane, day-to-day “endurance is more of the essence of fortitude than attack.” To patiently endure, to stand firm in the midst of criticism and adversity, reveals true courage. To rear children, to work faithfully for a lifetime, to pastor a congregation, may easily demand more fortitude than daring exploits on the battlefield or momentary heroics which lead to martyrdom. Ruth Graham recently said that as a young girl she sometimes fantasized about dying as a missionary martyr. Now in her 80’s, however, she’s coming to terms with the “martyrdom of old age,” something which is surely just as trying.

### COWARDICE AMPLY EVIDENT

Whether or not courage counts in today’s culture, however, seems debatable. We live in what some have termed the era of the anti-hero. It’s the victims rather than the victors who often gain our attention and applause! It’s a sign of the times, this absence of courage, this abolition of heroes. No less an authority than Alexander Solzhenitsyn has written: “A decline in courage may be the most striking feature that an outside observer notices in the West today. The Western world has lost its civic courage, both as a whole and separately, in each country, in each government, in each political party, and, of course, in the United Nations. Such a decline in courage is particularly noticeable among the ruling and intellectual elites, causing an impression of a loss of courage by the entire society.”

In a prophetic passage, in *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis anticipated Solzhenitsyn’s lament for our anti-hero era, wherein “We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.”

### BATTLEFIELD ILLUSTRATIONS

Sir Winston Churchill once declared that “without courage, all the other virtues lose their value.” It is “the form of every virtue” that enables one to act well, to be holy. Though some vices (such as greed) may have their advocates, we rarely hear cowardice praised—except in such ‘60’s slogans as “better red than dead.”

All too often “holiness” has been equated with “spineless” niceness! “Holy” persons are imagined to be like an imaginary “gentle Jesus, meek and mild” who never offends, never stands up to evil men. But those who equate sanctity with softness generally misunderstand Jesus’ command to “turn the other cheek” when struck by an enemy. In his commentary on St John’s Gospel, St Thomas Aquinas, following St Augustine, said we must interpret Jesus’ words “in the light of what Christ and the saints have actually practiced. Christ did not always offer His other cheek, nor Paul either.” Taking the words “turn the other cheek” too literally leads us astray. Jesus meant we should readily “bear, *if it be necessary*, such things and worse, without bitterness against the attacker,” having the courage, as Jesus modeled it, “to be crucified” if God wills it. To “turn the other cheek” does not, however, mean to avoid combat, to flee from the evil foes, to turn look away when men harm innocent people.

One of Lewis’s essays, “The Necessity of Chivalry,” praises the character of the fabled knight Launcelot, who was both “the meekest man that ever ate in hall among ladies” and “the sternest knight” to wield a sword. He is “fierce to the *n*th and meek to the *n*th.” Thus courageous men are, at times, wrathful! St Thomas says: “The brave man uses wrath for his own act, above all in attack, ‘for it is peculiar to wrath to pounce upon evil. Thus fortitude and wrath work directly upon each other.’” Taking a stand, doing what’s right, typically exposes one to a kind of death, so “all fortitude has reference to death.” The ultimate Christian courage, of course, is martyrdom—bearing witness to one’s faith and love by dying. “Thomas Aquinas seems to consider it to be almost the nature of fortitude that it fights against the *superior* power of evil, which the brave man can defeat only by his death or injury.”

## SOLZHENITSYN'S WARNINGS

During the 1970s I read most of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novels (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*; *First Circle*; *Cancer Ward*) as well as *The Gulag Archipelago*, a massive (three volume) documentation of Soviet brutality under Lenin and Stalin, and *The Oak and the Calf*, an account of his struggles with censorship in the USSR. By the decade's end, thanks to Solzhenitsyn, I was delivered from some of the academy's gilded portraits of the USSR and a bit better prepared to discern the Marxist rhetoric so glibly infusing many analyses of American history. And I was also prompted to re-examine, during the next decade, America's role in the world vis-à-vis both Communism and similarly aggressive ideologies such as Islam.

He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1970, and his *Nobel Lecture* focused on art and the role of the artist. "One kind of artist," markedly evident in the *avante garde* individualists of the West, "imagines himself the creator of an independent spiritual world and shoulders the act of creating that world and the people in it, assuming total responsibility for it" (p. 4). Such artists enjoy moments of fame but do little good. The other kind, endorsed by Solzhenitsyn, rightly understands his sacred vocation and "acknowledges a higher power above him and joyfully works as a common apprentice under God's heaven" (p. 4). To work wisely and well as an artist is a truly noble calling, for as Dostoevsky said, "Beauty will save the world." Great art, truthful art, weathers the winds of time and gives wings to our souls. Indeed, Plato's "old trinity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty" (p. 7) retains its ancient grandeur, and nothing rivals the importance of investing one's life in illuminating and defending such transcendent realities—the "permanent things."

Speaking personally, Solzhenitsyn had a sacred mission: to record, to explain, to imbed the gulag's story. "Our twentieth century has turned out to be more cruel than those preceding it" (p. 22), and millions died because too few believed in "fixed universal human concepts called good and justice" while the oppressors disdained them as "fluid, changing, and that there for one must always do what will benefit one's party" (p. 220). Sadly enough, might-makes-right philosophies forever enlist devotees, and hijackers and terrorists ever wreck their carnage. But despite the fact that there is much "slavery to half-cocked progressive ideas" (p. 24), one must courageously seek to refute them.

This means refuting the "spirit of Munich" that has spread cancerously throughout the West. That spirit, Solzhenitsyn says, "is dominant in the twentieth century. The intimidated civilized world has found nothing to oppose the onslaught of a sudden resurgent fang baring barbarism, except concessions and smiles. The spirit of Munich is a disease of the will of prosperous people; it is the daily state of those who have given themselves over to a craving for prosperity in every way, to material well-being as the chief goal of life on earth" (p. 24). He referred, of course, to the agreement Neville Chamberlain made with Adolf Hitler in 1938, declaring: "How horrible, how fantastic, how incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing!" Returning to the cheering masses in England, he proclaimed the arrival of "Peace in Our Time."

Replying to Chamberlain, Winston Churchill said: "I do not grudge our loyal, brave people . . . the natural, spontaneous outburst of joy and relief when they learned that the hard ordeal would no longer be required of them at the moment; but they should know the truth. They should know that . . . we have sustained a defeat without war, the consequences of which will travel far with us along with our road." The next year, of course, Germany invaded Poland. Even then, however, many Europeans sought to remain "neutral," numbly paralyzed in their pacifism. This, Churchill said, was "lamentable; and it will become much worse. They bow humbly and in fear of German threats. Each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, the crocodile will eat him last. All of them hope that the storm will pass before their turn comes to be devoured. But I fear—I fear greatly—the storm will not pass. It will rage and it will roar, ever more loudly, ever more widely."

The ghastly carnage of WWII, of course, might have been avoided had Churchill's warnings been heeded. But Chamberlain's appeasement postponed the conflict until it could only be waged against desperate odds. Neither the League of Nations nor Europe's politicians had the courage to resist. So it's up to writers such as himself, Solzhenitsyn said, to speak the truth to the world. While struggling against the autocracy of the USSR, he'd found an international fraternity of writers who rallied to his side when Communist hardliners sought to suppress him. His weapon, naturally, was the writer's pen enlisted to proclaim the truth. Tyranny thrives by lying. Truth tellers expose and ultimately defeat the tyrants. Writers "can VANQUISH LIES! In the struggle against lies, art has always won and always will" (p. 33). And so, he memorably declared in closing: "ONE WORD OF TRUTH OUGHTWEIGHS THE WORLD" (p. 34).

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Exiled from the USSR soon after receiving the Nobel Prize, Solzhenitsyn found refuge in the

mountains of Vermont, where he continued to write and declare the truth. Initially lionized by the American intelligentsia, he was invited to deliver the 1978 commencement address at Harvard University, published as *A World Split Apart*. He began his speech abrasively, noting that though Harvard's motto is *Veritas* graduates would find that "truth seldom is sweet; it is almost invariably bitter" (p. 1). And his words proved "bitter" to many who heard him! After assessing various developments around the world, he questioned the resolve of the West to deal with them. Alarming, he said, "A decline in courage may be the most striking feature that an outside observer notices in the West today. The Western world has lost its civic courage, both as a whole and separately, in each country, in each government, in each political part, and, of course, in the United Nations. Such a decline in courage is particularly noticeable among the ruling and intellectual elites, causing an impression of a loss of courage by the entire society" (pp. 9-11). This decline, "at times attaining what could be termed a lack of manhood," portended a cataclysmic cultural collapse.

Solzhenitsyn also lamented the West's materialism, litigiousness, licentiousness, and irresponsible individualism. Then he upbraided the media. Granted virtually complete "freedom," journalists in the West used it as a license for irresponsibility. Rather than working hard work to discover the truth, they slip into the slothful role of circulating rumors and personal opinions. Though no state censors restrict what's written, "fashionable" ideas get aired and the public is denied free access to the truth. "Hastiness and superficiality—these are the psychic diseases of the twentieth century and more than anywhere else this is manifested in the press" (p. 27). Consequently, "we may see terrorists heroized, or secret matters pertaining to the nation's defense publicly revealed, or we may witness shameless intrusion into the privacy of well-known people according to the slogan 'Everyone is entitled to know everything'" (p. 25).

Solzhenitsyn was further disturbed by the widespread pessimism and discontent Westerners displayed regarding economic development. Amazingly, elite intellectuals celebrated the very socialism that had destroyed his homeland. (Remember that Harvard's superstar economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, still trumpeted the virtues of socialism in the 1980s!) This, Solzhenitsyn warned, "is a false and dangerous current" (p. 33). In the East, "communism has suffered a complete ideological defeat; it is zero and less than zero. And yet Western intellectuals still look at it with considerable interest and empathy, and this is precisely what makes it so immensely difficult for the West to withstand the East" (p. 55). But the capitalist system in the West is no panacea either. Both East and West, he said, need "spiritual" rather than "economic" development, and the spirit has been "trampled by the party mob in the East, by the commercial one in the West" (p. 57).

American politicians who appeased Communism especially elicited Solzhenitsyn's scorn. Looking at the nation's recent withdrawal from Vietnam, he said: "the most cruel mistake occurred with the failure to understand the Vietnam War. Some people sincerely wanted all wars to stop just as soon as possible; others believed that the way should be left open for national, or Communist, self-determination in Vietnam (or in Cambodia, as we see today with particular clarity). But in fact, members of the U.S. antiwar movement became accomplices in the betrayal of Far Eastern nations, in the genocide and the suffering today imposed on thirty million people there. Do these convinced pacifists now hear the moans coming from there? Do they understand their responsibility today? Or do they prefer not to hear? The American intelligentsia lost its nerve and as a consequence the danger has come much closer to the United States. But there is no awareness of this. Your short-sighted politician who signed the hasty Vietnam capitulation seemingly gave America a carefree breathing pause; however a hundredfold Vietnams now looms over you" (p. 41). The future he envisioned would be shaped by a "fight of cosmic proportions," a battle between the forces of either Goodness or Evil. Those who are morally neutral, those who exalt in their moral relativism, are the true enemies of mankind.

Cowardice led to retreat in Southeast Asia. Democracies, Solzhenitsyn feared, lack the soul strength for sustained combat. "To defend oneself, one must also be ready to die; there is little such readiness in a society raised in the cult of material well-being. Nothing is left, in this case, but concessions, attempts to gain time, and betrayal" (p. 45). More deeply, the "humanism" that has increasingly dominated the West explains its weakness. When one believes ultimately only in himself, when human reason becomes the final arbiter, when human sinfulness is denied, the strength that comes only from God will dissipate. Ironically, the secular humanism of the West is almost identical with the humanism of Karl Marx, who said: "communism is naturalized humanism" (p. 53).

Consequently, he said, "If the world has not approached its end, it has reached a major watershed in history, equal in importance to the turn from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. It will demand from us a spiritual blaze; we shall have to rise to a new height of vision, to a new level of life, where our physical nature will not be cursed, as in the Middle Ages, but even more importantly, our spiritual being will not be trampled upon, as in the Modern Era" (pp. 60-61).