

# THE SPIRIT'S FOURTH GIFT: FORTITUDE

Is 11:1-3; Josh 1:6-9; Pr 28:1; Mt 1:30, 2:10; Heb 12:3

**I. DEFINITION:** a readiness to give one's life for the right reason in the right way; "Fortitude includes both kinds of courage—the kind that faces danger as well as the kind that 'sticks it out' under pain. 'Guts' is perhaps the nearest modern English" (C.S. Lewis). Thus: defying death, defusing discouragement, "bearing all things," persistently prevailing

## II. AVOIDING EXTREMES:

- A. Inordinate Fear—Cowardice: highly evident in age of "anti-hero"—"A decline in courage may be the most striking feature that an outside observer notices in the west today" (Alexander Solzhenitsyn); "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" (C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*); "snowflakes" & "safe spaces" & "microaggressions"
1. Fleeing battlefield, failing to defend innocents from aggression; pacifism's flaw: elevating one's righteousness (i.e. Stanley Hauerwas & Pope Francis re non-violence) over defending innocents
  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; Catholic hierarchy & homosexual priests; Obama re Iran
- B. Irrational Risk-taking—Rashness, Daring, Recklessness
1. Risking life for wrong reasons—fame, recognition, thrills, \$\$; thus 9/11 terrorists were rash, not courageous; daredevils rash, not courageous
  2. Risking life imprudently—overwhelming odds (surrender on battlefield may be honorable); thus impossible goals/expeditions (various missionary endeavors) irresponsible

## III. COMPONENTS:

- A. Healthy/Honorable Aggressiveness (courageous Brave-Heart); taking initiative, acting righteously
1. Mental preparation: confidence (hopeful trust in another's word and help)
    - a. Trusting God's gracious assistance primary ("fear not")
    - b. Taking others' help secondary, but essential (e.g. soldier's buddies or church support)
  2. Accomplishing task: *magnanimity* (bold vision, confidence)
    - a. Envisioning and bringing about a noble endeavor—e.g. General David Petraeus' surge in Iraq; church building programs; missionary exploits; godly family
    - b. Envisioning, attaining righteousness, godliness, holiness—and the "honor" attending that goal (cf. Lewis's "Weight of Glory"), worthy of, thankful for God's gifts rightly invested
- B. Endurance (inner strength to carry on: bearing burdens)
1. Patience: enduring discomforts, disappointments, failures, opposition
  2. Perseverance: working to finish task, run race

## IV. ILLUSTRATIONS:

- A. Physical: Life Offered—sacrificial moment or enduring commitment
1. Professionals: soldiers, policemen, firemen
  2. Parents: mothers (giving birth) & fathers (protecting)
  3. Martyrs: litany of Christians: Ignatius of Antioch; Cyprian of Carthage; Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Jim Elliott; 20<sup>th</sup> century "The Century of Martyrs" (H.W. Crocker, *Triumph*)
- B. Intellectual: Truth Upheld
1. Jesus before Pilate; Paul on trial; John re Gnostics
  2. Irenaeus at Lyons; Luther at Worms; John Henry Newman & Oxford Movement re Liberalism
  3. Norwegian teachers under Nazis; Solzhenitsyn vs. USSR; embattled conservatives today
- C. Moral: Right Done Despite the Cost
1. T.S. Eliot & first wife
  2. Pro-Life Stalwarts—PA senator Casey vs. Clintons at 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 as 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."