

Courage

The Christian of all people needs courage and resolution. There is nothing he does as a Christian, or can do, which is not an act of valour.

A cowardly spirit is beneath the lowest duty of a Christian. Is he to 'be strong and very courageous' that he may stand in battle against warlike nations? No, but that he may 'observe and do' all the law which Moses God's servant commanded (*see Joshua 1:7*).

It requires more prowess and greatness of spirit to obey God faithfully than to command an army of men. A Christian is to pray. The Christian in prayer comes close to God, with a humble boldness of faith, and takes hold of him, and wrestles with him. He will not let him go without receiving a blessing. He does all this in the face of his own sins and divine justice.

There is no duty for a Christian who walks with God that is not lined with many difficulties. What then is the Christian to do?

First, the Christian is to wage war against his bosom sins; that is against those sins which lie near his heart. What courage and resolution does this require? It means ridding yourself of your lust, your dearest love, the sin which has caused the most joy and laughter from which you have promised yourself the greatest pleasure. You are to lay hands on it and run the knife of mortification into the very heart of it. This you are to do freely and joyfully, and before you embrace again.

Who is able to express the conflicts, the wrestlings, the convulsions of spirit the Christian feels before he brings his heart to do this work? Who can fully set forth the arguments with which such a lust will plead for itself?

What resolution does it require? The valiant swordsmen of the world have shown themselves mere cowards in the face of such.

Secondly, the Christian is not to be conformed to the world and its ways (see Romans

12:2). We are commanded not to accommodate ourselves to the corrupt customs of the world. The Christian must not cut the coat of his profession according to the fashion of the times or the humour of the company he meets. The Christian must stand fixed in his principles and not change his ways. He is to freely show what he is by his holy constancy in the truth.

To what an odium, what snares, what dangers does this singleness of mind expose the Christian? Some will mock him as Michal flouted David. The world counts the Christian a fool. As some mock, so others will persecute to death. They will do this because the Christian does not conform to the world's ways.

This was the trap laid for the three young men in the book of Daniel. They were to dance to Nebuchadnezzar's tune or burn. This was the plot laid to ensnare Daniel. It is a great honour for Christians when all their enemies say they will not do as we do. When a Christian must turn or burn, he needs to be well locked into the saddle of his

profession or he will soon be dismantled.

Thirdly, the Christian must keep on the way to heaven.

He must do this in the midst of all the scandals that are cast upon the ways of God by the apostasy and foul falls of false professors. There have always been such in the church. By their sad miscarriages in judgment and practice they have laid stumbling blocks in the way of true believers.

Christians are ready to make a stand, They need a holy resolution to bear up against discouragements and not faint. Joshua lived to see the whole camp of Israel, with a very few exceptions, revolt and in their hearts turn back to Egypt. Yet he, with an undaunted spirit, maintained his integrity. He resolved that, even if a single person would not stand with him, he would serve the Lord.

Fourthly, the Christian must trust in God (see Isaiah 50:10). Let

him who walks in darkness, and sees no light, trust in the name of the Lord, and rely upon his God. This requires a holy boldness of faith, to venture into God's presence, as

Esther did into that of Ahasuerus. And to do so even when no smile is to be seen on his face, or no golden sceptre of the promise is perceived by the soul. Furthermore we are to trust God as Job did when it seemed that God's love was hidden and his wrath had broken out.

Fifthly, the believer is to persevere on the Christian course to the end of his life.

Our work and life must go together. This adds weight to every other difficulty of the Christian's calling. We have known many who have gone into the field, and liked the work of a soldier for a battle or two, but soon have had enough, and come running home again. Few can bear it. Many who are soon engaged in holy duties, who are easily persuaded to take up a profession of faith, are easily persuaded to lay it down. They are like the new moon, which shines a little in the first part of the night, but is down before half the night is gone.

To persevere in this is a hard word! It is not easy to take up the cross daily, to pray always, to watch night and day, to never lay aside our armour, to be unbending in waiting upon God, and to walk with God. Many turn

away from Christ. Yet this is a saint's duty. Everyday, without any vacation from one end of the year to the other, he seeks to do this.

What does this teach us?

First it explains why there are many who say they believe in God and but yet there are few true Christians.

There are many who run but few who reach the goal. There are many who go into the field against Satan, and yet few who come out conquerors.

All may have a desire to be happy, but few have courage and resolution to grapple with the difficulties they meet. All Israel came joyfully out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, but when their bellies were pinched with a little hunger, and the desires of Canaan were deferred, they were ready to flee and make a dishonorable retreat into Egypt.

Many who profess to be Christian, when they are tried, do not endure for Christ but grow sick. Their hearts fail them. Like Orpah (*see Ruth 1*), they go a furlong or two with Christ, while he takes away their worldly hopes and bids them prepare for

hardship. Then they kiss and leave him, loath to lose heaven, but more loath to attain it at so dear a price. To follow Christ fully requires another spirit than that which the world can give or receive.

Secondly, it teaches Christians to labour for a singleness of mind.

This is needful for our Christian profession. Without it we cannot be what we profess to be. Christ tries his children by their courage. Take heart therefore and be strong. Your cause is good. God himself stands with you. He shall lead you on with courage and take you home with honour.

He lived and died for you. He will live and die with you. There is none like him in showing mercy and tenderness to his soldiers. Trajan, it is said, tore his clothes to bind up his soldiers' wounds. Christ poured out his blood as balm to heal his saints' wounds. For prowess, there is none to compare with him. He never turned his head from danger, not even when hell's malice and heaven's justice appeared against him. Knowing all that would come upon him, he went forth. He never lost a battle even when he lost his life. He

won, carrying with him to heaven the spoils in the triumphant chariot of his ascension. In heaven, where he makes an open show of them, saints and angels are filled with an unspeakable joy.

We march in the midst of gallant spirits, our fellow-soldiers being the sons of a Prince. Christians, God and angels are spectators, observing how we behave. Every exploit of our faith against sin and Satan causes a shout in heaven. While we valiantly slay this temptation, scale that difficulty, or regain ground, our dear Saviour, who stands by to help us, his very heart leaps within him for joy to see the proof of our love for him and zeal for him in all our combats. He will not forget the faithful service we do for him here on earth.

When we have run the race and fought the fight, he will receive us with joy into heaven and into the very presence of his Father.

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