

A Needed Balance Between Courage And Moderation

The inability of even the most devout people to show Christian virtues in equal proportions and without admixture of un-Christlike qualities has been a source of heartache to many of God's believing people.

Two virtues, that of courage and moderation, when held in correct proportion, make for a well-balanced life and one of great usefulness in the Kingdom of God.

Where one of these virtues is missing or only present in a minute degree, the result is a life out of balance and powers wasted.

Almost any sincere writing, if examined closely, will be found to be autobiographic.

We all know best what we have personally experienced.

This article is **not** an exception.

Briefly, I have seldom been called a coward, even by my most hostile enemies, but my want of moderation has sometimes caused grief to my dearest friends.

I had this brought home to me very forcefully on one occasion.

For many years I have been a Bible lecturer giving presentations in various churches.

On one occasion in South London, I was visiting a church for the third time and was greeted at the door with the remark, "*what are you going to hit us with today?*"

On reflection, the lecture I was about to give was rather corrective.

An extreme disposition, such as this, is **not** easy to tame, for the temptation to bring severe, immoderate methods to the aid of Jesus Christ is one **not** easily resisted.

The apostle Peter had this problem at times with more courage than moderation. [Matthew 16:21-23; John 18:10-11; Acts 1:15; Acts 4:13]

James and John had a similar unbalanced attitude before the Holy Spirit brought balance to their lives. [Mark 3:17; Luke 9:51-56]

As well as the calming work of the Holy Spirit I have one experienced person to help me with is problem, my wife Sylvia, whom I continue to love dearly inspite of the correction I receive from her.

Here the contrast between the ways of God and the ways of human beings is seen.

Apart from such wisdom as available in God's Word, the Christian Bible and painful personal experience, we all are prone to try to secure our ends by direct attack.

One example of this was Samson, a devout man of God. [Judges 13:24-25]

Samson's way was direct assault and it worked well in his conflict with the pagan Philistines except for one minor oversight, it slew the victor Samson, along with the enemies of God that he vanquished in the end. [Judges 16:23-31]

Isaiah 42:2-3 [King James] *“He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.”*

Jesus Christ is the perfect example of courage balanced with moderation.

Jesus Christ achieved His tremendous purposes without undue physical exertion and altogether without violence.

Jesus Christ’s life was marked by moderation, yet He was of all humans the most utterly courageous.

Luke 13:31-35 [King James] *“The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee. And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”*

This was an example of consummate courage but no defiance, no sign of contempt, no extravagance of words or action.

This was courage with moderation.

Lack of courage is a grave fault and may be a real sin when it leads to compromise in doctrine or practice.

To sit back for the sake of peace and allow the enemies of Jesus Christ to deceive people is never the part of a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Moderation to the point of surrender where holy things are concerned is certainly never a virtue.

The fury of one person never furthered the glory of God.

There is a right way to do things, and it is never the violent way.

God has used and will continue to use people in spite of their failure to hold these qualities of courage and moderation in proper balance.

1 Kings 18:17-40 [NIV] *“When he saw Elijah, he said to him, ‘Is that you, you troubler of Israel?’ ‘I have not made trouble for Israel,’ Elijah replied. ‘But you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the LORD’s commands and have followed the Baals. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.’ So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before the people and said, ‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.’ But the people said nothing. Then Elijah said to them, ‘I am the only one of the LORD’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire, he is God.’ Then all the people said, ‘What you say is good.’ Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, ‘Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.’ So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from*

morning till noon. 'O Baal, answer us!' they shouted. But there was no response; no-one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them. 'Shout louder!' he said. 'Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or travelling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.' So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no-one answered, no-one paid attention. Then Elijah said to all the people, 'Come here to me.' They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which was in ruins. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, 'Your name shall be Israel.' With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench round it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, 'Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.' 'Do it again,' he said, and they did it again. 'Do it a third time,' he ordered, and they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: 'O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.' Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!' Then Elijah commanded them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!' They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there."

Elijah was a man of courage, facing the King Ahab who had been influenced by pagan Jezebel and 800 pagan prophets of Baal.

But Elijah was **not** a man of patience or moderation.

Elijah carried the day by assault, by challenge and was not above satire and abuse when he thought it would help things along.

1 Kings 19:1-3 [NIV] "Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, 'May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.' Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there,"

Yet after the enemy of God was confounded, Elijah sank into the depths of despair.

That is the way of the extreme nature of a person of extreme courage without moderation.

1 Samuel 2:22-25 [NIV] "Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. So he said to them, 'Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the LORD's people. If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?' His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the LORD's will to put them to death."

Eli, on the other hand, was a man of moderation. He could not say "no" even to his own family.

Eli loved a weak peace and stark tragedy was the price he paid for his cowardice. [1 Samuel 4:11, 17-18], the death of his two sons and then his own death.

Both Elijah and Eli were good men but they could not find the happy medium between courage and moderation.

Let us now consider another great man whom God used in a powerful way, the apostle Paul, who became a man of great courage yet with a patient disposition.

What Paul might have been apart from the grace of God is seen in a brief description given of him before his meeting with Jesus Christ and his conversion, at the stoning to death of Stephen.

Acts 7:58 [King James] *“And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul.”*

Paul was still known by his original name Saul.

Acts 8:1-3 [NIV] *“And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.”*

Saul violently and with great passion attacked the early Christian Church, no sign of moderation.

Acts 15:36-40 [NIV] *“Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.’ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.”*

Even after his conversion Paul was capable of summary judgements when he felt strongly on a subject. His curt rejection of Mark is an example. But time, personal suffering and his increasing intimacy with his patient Saviour, Jesus Christ, seems to have cured this fault in this great man of God.

It is a significant thing that there is **no** record of a coward ever being cured nor a timid person ever growing into a man of courage.

The Church needs at this moment leaders with courage for fear broods over many congregations.

Fear of losing popularity, fear of being confronted with attacks from the godless society in which we have to live, fear to peach against the sins that pervade our society and are clearly outlined in God’s Word, the Christian Bible.

Fear to counter the rise in “*human rights*” when the rights of our Creator God are totally ignored.

Fear as we see the rise in numbers of non-Christian religions and the influence they have on the way society is conducted.

2 Timothy 1:7 [NIV] *“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”*

This fear is not the product of the Holy Spirit, but a lack of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

2 Timothy 1:8-14 [NIV] *“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I*

know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you, guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.”

In Paul’s day, as in our generation, it was a time of mounting persecution of the early Church by the state and society.

Timothy’s fears were based on fact but Paul promised that God would give him the strength and courage to continue to preach the Good News that Jesus Christ brought to all humanity.

Timothy was, like Paul, imprisoned for preaching the Good News. There is no record of when but it did happen because the writer of Hebrews mentions his release. [**Hebrews 13:23**]

What is needed now in the Christian Church, is leaders and followers of quiet courage, who draw their strength each moment from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and are the hardly aware of self at all, only the God-given task of preaching the gospel message to a world who may as yet **not** accept it.

Such courage will be patient also well-balanced and safe from extremes.

Revelation 12:7-10 [NIV] *“And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down, that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.’”*

This is a predicted war in the heaven, **not** the one that is recorded in Isaiah and Ezekiel when the great archangel Lucifer tried to take over the throne of God [**Isaiah 14:12-15**] and in defeat was renamed Satan, meaning adversary of God.

Revelation 12:11-12 [NIV] *“They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”*

The way this influence of Satan is overcome is by people of courage, being willing to risk their physical lives to preach the Good News of what Jesus has done for all humanity on the cross.

The sacrifice and resurrection that overcame the power that Satan uses to control humans, the power of death. [**Hebrews 2:14-15**]

Also the courage to live a Christian life in a society that is becoming more and more hostile to the Christian faith.

This is where we as Christians stand, courage with moderation and victory over evil or just timid, giving in to the evil forces that are in this godless society and ending our lives in shame.