

Has Courage Become a Casualty of our Culture?

The “fruit” of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance) are characteristics that our western culture would have a very hard time defining in concrete terms, yet they are very, very real in Scripture. Our culture (the only one with which I am familiar) doesn’t deny their existence, but treats them in an I’ll-recognize-it-when-I-see-it fashion. The problem becomes one of experience. I only recognize what I have already experienced. So, these same fruit become defined by our experience and not necessarily through the example of Scripture. In reality, since most of us are culture-driven rather than Scripture-driven, they become dumbed down by our lack of experience.

In this mode of operation, we also make one very large mistake—we tend to define the fruit of the Holy Spirit as an act or through one’s conduct. We say that God says we shall know someone by their fruits (Mat.7:16) and we look for the fruit of the Spirit to be manifested in people’s lives, but that is not what is going on. The fruit *of the Spirit* is manifested by the Spirit to our spirit when we share fellowship with God and not necessarily to those around us. It is our spirit that receives and recognizes the fruit as the product of the Holy Spirit. In turn, we generate fruit as we are led (or not led) by the Holy Spirit that others may see. The problem, again, is that others are not interpreting the fruit of your spirit by your thoughts and intentions (as God does), but by their own experiences and suspicions. [Fortunately, God is the one who will judge our spirit’s fruit.] Thus, you and I are very flawed at discerning the quality of spiritual fruit in our own strength (and experience).

Despite our flawed abilities to properly classify the spiritual fruit of others, these fruit are still a vital part of our existence and an undeniable fact of our Christian walk. Why are they so important in Scripture? They are important in part because they represent examples of the only thing that is truly *real* to God. That is, the only thing that will last—your thoughts. That’s right! You can’t take anything with you to heaven (or hell)—except your thoughts. All of heaven and earth will one day be destroyed and recreated, but your thoughts survive everything. You have heard the expression, “It’s not about you?” Well, as far as you are concerned, it really is about you—your thoughts, anyway.

There is one fruit in particular on which I would like to focus—love. Love is the most important and most frequently mentioned doctrine in the Bible (if memory serves). In particular, it is “agape” (ἀγάπη) love to which I am referring. Agape love is the highest form of love (the others being brotherly love and sensual love) and is manifested to others through service or ministry.

Jesus Christ teaches that there is no greater “love” (agape love) that can be expressed than to give one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:13). That, dear readers, is the greatest manifestation of love—dying to save someone else. You can’t get much more genuine in

service or ministry than dying to save someone else. That's *real* courage. You don't see it much in our culture, though. True, you see it on the battlefield. It's also not an uncommon trait among those in the police and fire departments and selected other inherently dangerous occupations, but you see very little of it in day-to-day living. It's pretty much been obliterated by the influence of our culture, hasn't it? If you scream for help on a city street today will anyone come to help you? If jobs are on the line, will anyone defend or stand with you in the workplace if you elect to stand on principle? How many teen students will buck the system of intense peer pressure to stand up for someone being bullied?

One might say that courage has become a casualty of our culture.

But, wait a minute! Isn't courage supposed to be a defining characteristic of a truly committed believer?

- Did David shirk from Goliath and the Philistines? [1Sam.17]
- Did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego back peddle when Nebuchadnezzar pointed to the furnace? [Dan.3]
- Did Daniel stop praying when he became aware of the King's proclamation to kill anyone who prayed to God? [Dan.6]
- Did Gideon hide from the combined armies of the Midianites and Amalekites? [Jg.7]
- Did Stephen back down when confronted with the crowd of angry Jews? [Acts 22]
- Did Peter and John accommodate the Jewish council when commanded not to speak of Christ to the crowds? [Acts 4-5]

So, where does that leave us? If you look at the examples above you will note that the behavior exhibited was not extraordinary in the sense that they did not reach down to some deep recesses of their psyche to muster the strength of character needed for such deeds. Not at all! Rather, it was simply a response to what they *actually believed* in their heart was true.

I was visiting a men's Sunday School class recently in which the long-running topic was how to be a "real" man. The false premise being espoused was that they could be "real men" if they only *acted* like real men. They were going to put on real manliness without actually addressing the underlying cause of their less-than-stellar behavior thus far. After listening patiently to the lesson being espoused by the otherwise well-meaning teacher, I asked the question, "Tell me, each of you, how your actual behavior has changed as a result of what you have been learning here." One by one, they all looked away from me. Not a single participant would offer an example of significant behavior change—not a single one!

Why is that? Years of observation suggest to me that underlying the degradation of courage is a simple lack of faith. The bottom line is that if they had a modicum of faith (the “faith of a mustard seed”) they would already be acting like real men. Their beliefs would be revealed through their behavior. [It isn’t and they aren’t.]

THE BOTTOM LINE

Do you know that you are saved?

If so, then you also must know that your reservation in heaven is guaranteed, right? No matter what happens, you are going home to be with the Lord (“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”).

The question is whether you really believe that (or, are you simply pretending to be a Christian). Why? Because it is your fear of death that has allowed Satan to control you in the past. But it’s not supposed to be that way.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [Christ] also himself likewise took part of the same [took on humanity]; that through [physical] death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

Heb 2:14

And deliver them [us] who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Heb 2:15

Heb.2:15 distinguishes three types of individuals:

1. The person who is not saved and, thus, still fears death. And so, is still subject to Satan’s bondage both practically (day-to-day) and positionally (their eternal fate).
2. The person who is saved, but does not understand the impact of salvation on day-to-day life. So, they too still fear death and are (practically, at least) still in Satan’s bondage.
3. The person who is saved and fully understands and appreciates both the eternal and practical significance of Christ’s death. This person does not fear death and is no longer subject to Satan’s (practical) bondage.

So, if Christ’s death has rescued you from that bondage (both eternal and practical), then what is your excuse now?

Isn’t it true that a lot of people are not saved and have no such hope?

So, if you witness an accident in which a car overturns and catches on fire, what possible excuse would you have for not risking your life to save someone who may need more time to hear the Gospel and become saved?

But would you?

Would you step forward, regardless of the ever-present high school peer pressure to defend someone being bullied?

Would you stand for doing the right thing at work even if it meant you may well lose your job?

When was the last time you took a risk for anyone (and how much does that say about what you *truly* believe)?