Cultivating Courage in

Turbulent Times

## introduction

* We are living in very difficult times presently in our country
* We are still dealing with the effects of covid-19 as well as watching our nation devolve into protest and riots over racial injustice
* Additionally, the presidential election is only two months away which heightens the instability by amping up the political rhetoric and polarizing our nation along partisan lines
* For the Christian, the turbulence is magnified by the fact that we find ourselves increasingly at odds with a very secular, depraved culture
* We wake up daily in a nation and world that are gradually more and more hostile to our beliefs and values
* Even the basic freedoms that define our country – freedom of speech and religion – are under attack
* Specifically, a rising number of issues are causing faithful Christians to be the object of the world’s hatred and opposition
* As the tide of secularism takes our culture further and further down the path of godlessness, we as believers will be considered all the more out of step with the culture
* As such, believers will find themselves in the crosshairs of a world that will level its venomous hatred at those who love Christ and His Word
* This list of issues is a small sampling of the ones that will incite the world’s wrath and indignation against us: Social Justice…Black Lives Matter…Homosexuality/SSA…Transgenderism…Abortion…Role of the Government (including police and military)…Exclusivity of Christ…Inerrancy and Authority of the Word…All Standards of Biblical Morality…Fallacy of Evolution
* This should not cause us as believers to be at all surprised as God promises that the world will hate us…because it has always hated God’s people
* History is replete with examples of believers who have been hated by the world:

**Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego**

**Daniel**

**Jeremiah**

**John the Baptist**

**Christ**

**The Apostles**

* James (brother of John) – beheaded
* Philip – scourged, thrown into prison, and then crucified
* Matthew – died in Ethiopia after being chopped apart by a halberd
* James – at the age of 94, was beaten and stoned by the Jews, who bashed his brains out with a club
* Matthias – stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded
* Andrew – crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground
* Peter – crucified with his head down and his feet upward
* Bartholomew – cruelly beaten and crucified
* Thomas – after preaching the Gospel in India, was killed by pagan priests who thrust a spear through him
* Thaddeus – stoned to death
* Simon the zealot – crucified
* John - Captured at Ephesus, he was taken to Rome where he was put into a cauldron of hot, boiling oil. By a miracle of God, he was taken out without any injury. Domitian immediately banished him to the Isle of Patmos, where John wrote the book of Revelation. He is the only disciple of Christ to escape violent death.

**Acts 14:22** ~ strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

**John 15:18-21** ~ If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.

**John 16:33** ~ These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

**1 Thessalonians 3:3** ~ so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.

**2 Timothy 3:12** ~ Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

**1 Peter 2:21** ~ For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

**1 Peter 4:12-14** ~ Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

**Hebrews 11:36-40** ~ and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

* Martin Luther famously made his “Here I Stand” speech at the Diet of Worms in 1521
* During the five-year reign of Bloody Mary, nearly 300 pastors were burned at the stake
* One of those men was John Hooper, bishop of Gloucester, who refused to stop preaching and was put in prison for 18 months and sentenced to be burned as a heretic
* On the morning of his martyrdom (Feb 9, 1555), he was led to Gloucester where an immense crowd of nearly 7000 people were present
* When Hooper arrived at the stake, he was allowed to pray but forbidden to speak to the people
* After he had prayed, he was given one last opportunity to recant of his teaching but he refused
* He was fastened to the stake by an iron around his waist
* Three times the wood had to be lighted because it would not burn properly
* For 45 minutes Hooper endured the flames as Fox says “neither moving backward, forward, nor to any side” but only praying and beating his breast with one hand until it was burned to a stump
* Similarly, today, Christians are being portrayed as menaces to society, the cause of many of the world’s problems
* And those who love God, honor His Word, and stand up for truth are often ridiculed and threatened
* The question is: How will we react to the rising opposition against Christians?
* “Perhaps a time is coming, perhaps the stage is being set — though I pray we might live peaceful and quiet lives — for Christians in the West to be treated as most Christians have been throughout most of church history (and as many are treated now throughout the world). And should it come, we must decide now, will we be mad enough, should our God call us, to face the mobs and persecution in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit? Only those who know this world is not the end can do so.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

## the serious danger of spiritual cowardice

* Wilting in the face of opposition and persecution should not characterize us as believers
* Although resistance from the world can be intimidating, we must not cave under the pressure when it comes
* Voddie Baucham: “You can avoid persecution. All you have to do is compromise.”
* Although some believers throughout church history have compromised (i.e. Thomas Cranmer who recanted his life work when fear got the best of him), such a response should not characterize genuine Christians

### It is Characteristic of Sinful Unbelievers

**Revelation 21:8** ~ But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

* God identifies spiritual cowardice as a sin worthy of eternal punishment in the lake of fire
* In fact, the first trait of those who are destined to perish in the lake of fire is cowardice
* A cowardly response in the face of opposition is a serious sin that reveals a heart of unbelief
* Who are these “cowardly”? 🡺 they are professing believers who are so overcome with fear in the face of opposition that they equivocate on the truth and, in some cases, deny it entirely
* Spiritual cowards yield to the pressure and threats from the world
* They become fearful of what an uncompromising, courageous life of standing for Christ might cost them
* They are unwilling to pay the high price of not conforming to the world
* In short, they are not overcomers (cf. Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7)
* “These are the ones who lack endurance (cf. [Matthew 24:13](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Matt%2024.13); [Mark 8:35](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Mark%208.35)). They fell away when their faith was challenged or opposed because their faith was not genuine. Jesus described such people in the parable of the soils: ‘The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away’ ([Matthew 13:20–21](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Matt%2013.20%E2%80%9321)). These are the ones who “shrink back to destruction” ([Hebrews 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Heb%2010.39)).”[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Matthew 13:20-21** ~ The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

### It is Contrary to Biblical Examples

* Faithful believers throughout the ages have always resisted the temptation to become cowardly in their responses to opposition from the world

**Deuteronomy 31:6** ~ “Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you.”

**Joshua 1:8-9** ~ This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. 9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

**Psalm 27:1-3** ~ The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread? 2 When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell. 3 Though a host encamp against me, My heart will not fear; Though war arise against me, In spite of this I shall be confident.

**Psalm 34:1-11** ~ I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. 2 My soul will make its boast in the Lord; The humble will hear it and rejoice. 3 O magnify the Lord with me, And let us exalt His name together. 4 I sought the Lord, and He answered me, And delivered me from all my fears. 5 They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces will never be ashamed. 6 This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him And saved him out of all his troubles. 7 The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, And rescues them. 8 O taste and see that the Lord is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! 9 O fear the Lord, you His saints; For to those who fear Him there is no want. 10 The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; But they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing. 11 Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

**Isaiah 41:10, 13** ~ Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand…13 For I am the Lord your God, who upholds your right hand, Who says to you, ‘Do not fear, I will help you.

### It is Inconsistent with Gospel Effectiveness

**2 Timothy 1:7** ~ For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

* In his final letter, Paul reminded Timothy of the attitude he would need to have to face opposition in ministry
* In 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul instructed Timothy saying, “For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands”
* Paul wanted Timothy to remember his commitment to defend the gospel and faithfully shepherd believers
* He urged him to “kindle afresh” (i.e. “keep the fire alive, fan the embers into flame, don’t let it die out) his spiritual gift
* He urged him to devote himself to serving the Lord and displaying courage, knowing that he was in the Lord’s will
* Timothy was to be faithful to his calling and to his task of fully carrying out the work God gave him
* How as this to happen? 🡺 Verse 7 tells us (notice the “for” at the beginning of the verse)
* Timothy was not to be timid in the work of the ministry…he was not so shrink back
* He was not to be cowardly or fearful or insecure about what the Lord had called him to do
* Rather, he was to remember that had provided him everything he needed for life and ministry
* He had been granted “power…love…discipline”
	+ “power” = *dunamis* = the strength we need to be effective in His service
	+ “love” = *agape* = God gives us the ability to love Him and others fully to carry out our ministry
	+ “discipline” = *sophonismos* = sound mind, self controlled, properly prioritized mind…God has given us the ability to control our lives by living in a divinely-ordered way where godly wisdom is displayed in every situation
* This is a call to forsake cowardice and serve the Lord courageously so that Gospel ministry is effective
* As opposition mounts against believers and churches, we must remember that God’s people must not become soft or weak-kneed in the face of such fear and intimidation
* We must not collapse or cave under threats of persecution…because compromise is rooted in the fear of man and being ashamed of the truth in the face of opposition

## the great need for unwavering courage

* The great need of the hour is for believers to be characterized by courageous Christianity
* “That means we don’t need to yield to the mounting pressure to conform to the world’s skewed values, sinful social norms, and ever-shifting morality. We don’t need to acquiesce to a world determined to sideline the church and silence the proclamation of the gospel.”[[3]](#footnote-3)
* We must stand firm because, throughout Scripture, God’s people are repeatedly called to act courageously:

**1 Chronicles 28:20** ~ Then David said to his son Solomon, “Be strong and courageous, and act; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you until all the work for the service of the house of the Lord is finished.”

**Psalm 31:24** ~ Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in the Lord.

**Psalm 56:3-4** ~ When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?

**Ephesians 6:10-11** ~ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

**1 Corinthians 16:13** ~ Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

* Christ is the supreme model of courage in the face of opposition, who went to the cross with an unflinching resolution

**Hebrews 12:2** ~ fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

* The apostle Paul is also an example of great courage in the face of strong opposition

**Acts 14:2-3** ~ But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren. 3 **Therefore** they spent a long time there **speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord,** who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.

* Perhaps Paul’s pastoral courage is no more evident than in his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:
	+ He faced great opposition “through the plots of the Jews” (v. 19)
	+ Yet, he “did not shrink from declaring…anything that was profitable” (v. 20) – see also the same phrase “did not shrink from declaring the whole purpose of God” in v. 27
	+ In the face of such opposition, he faithfully and boldly preached the Gospel (v. 21)
	+ He even courageously faced the future, knowing that opposition awaited him in Jerusalem (vv. 22-23)
	+ He did not “consider my life of any account as dear to myself” (v. 24) – he was not primarily concerned about his personal safety but his faithful ministry…his ambition was to “finish my course”
	+ He also charged the Ephesian elders to the same boldness and courage he modeled for them (vv. 28-31)
* Although we are living in an age where bold speech and clear language are increasingly rare, it is these commitments that we are called to courageously model
* We must resist the pressure to stay silent when we ought to speak up
* We must resist the temptation to dull the sharp edges of truth in order lessen the hostile responses
* We must be clear and courageous communicators of God’s Word
* Even though the world largely wants nothing to do with the Gospel we preach or the biblical morality we uphold, we must faithfully and courageously proclaim the truth
* We must prepare our hearts now for the likelihood that persecution will come to us in the US as it has come to believers around the world
* What courage is NOT:
	+ It is not recklessness
	+ It is not a cavalier boorishness where one spoiling for a fight
	+ It is not mere human fortitude, although such bravery is commendable
* What Biblical courage IS: It is the willingness to do what is right, regardless of the cost
* It is standing upon the truth at all times, even if the cost is great (including death)
* It is standing firm and refusing to compromise even when difficult circumstances arise, refusing to compromise
* It is to love God, Christ, and the Gospel enough to stand firm and not compromise despite threats
* It involves a willingness to suffer when those who hate the truth oppose us
* It involves a willingness to stand alone when others hate the truth

## the purposeful Development of Courageous christianity

### An Abandonment of Seeking Affirmation from the World

**1 John 2:15-17** ~ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

**James 4:4** ~ You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

* We must not expect the world to affirm our convictions or welcome our biblical standards of morality
* To long for the world’s approval will only foster cowardice rather than courage

### An Anticipation of Our Heavenly Home

**Philippians 3:20 ~** For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

* In the same way the Philippians were Roman citizens living under Roman law in another country, so too, we as Christians are to live according to the laws of heaven even though we are on earth
* Just as Philippi was a colony of Rome in Macedonia, so the church is a “colony of heaven” on earth
* Paul is telling believers to live like foreigners, understanding that their real home is in heaven
* Our names are recorded there, our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ are there, our inheritance is there , our reward is there, and our treasure is there

**Hebrews 11:13** ~ All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

**1 Peter 1:17** ~ If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth;

**1 Peter 2:11** ~ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

* As believers, we live in a place not our own and among a people not our own
* We are guests in this world, temporary residents who are just passing through
* This world is not our home!
* C. H. Spurgeon: “Courage, brother, courage, sister; there is rest for the weary; there is eternal rest for the beloved of the Lord, and when thou shalt arrive in heaven, how little, how utterly insignificant thy toil will seem, even if it shall have lasted threescore years and ten.”

### An Unwavering Commitment to the Word of God

* Courage comes from knowing and being firmly convinced that we are speaking divine truth which carries the authority of God
* To speak truth is to speak on behalf of God

**Psalm 19:7-9** ~ The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** ~ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

**Hebrews 4:12** ~ For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

* Confidence in the Word of God is the key to courageous Christianity

### An Absolute Confidence in the Power of the Gospel

**Romans 1:16 ~** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is **the power of God** for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

**1 Corinthians 1:18-25** ~ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is **the power of God**. 19 For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.” 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ **the power of God** and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men

* “power” is the word *dunamis* in Greek which is where we get our English words “dynamite, dynamic”
* The Gospel is active, energetic, vibrant, vigorous…full of life and power
* The Gospel is effective because it carries with it the power of God
* The Gospel is the ultimate entity in which God’s power resides and does its greatest work
* This is what makes the Gospel so effective…it is backed by the power of God’s omnipotence!
* Nothing other than the power of God can overcome our sinful nature and give us new life
* Only the power of God in the Gospel can affect salvation
* Only the Gospel can open blind eyes, open deaf ears, remove the heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh, regenerate, and make someone into a new creation
* The Gospel has total power to save and sanctify, to deliver and to rescue
* The Gospel message is in itself offensive to the unbeliever, but our courage comes from understanding that it is that Gospel that saves

### A Fear of God Rather Than Fear of Man

**Matthew 10:24-31** ~ A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. 25 It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! 26 Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27 What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. 28 Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

* A number of elements in this text should motivate us to biblical courage:
	+ A reminder that we are in good company when we are opposed (vv. 24-25) – if they called the perfect Son of God “the devil,” we who are His followers should expect the same treatment
	+ A three-fold admonition to not be afraid (vv. 26, 28, 31) – no one can harm us, even if we die, because God is with us
	+ One day God will vindicate the truth (v. 26) – there is coming a day when the truth will be made known
	+ We can rest in God’s good and sovereign hands (vv. 29-31) – if God cares for the sparrows and knows when they perish, He certainly knows us and our present circumstances
* It is the fear of God that will give you true courage in every situation
* For all these reasons (and many more), we must not yield to the spirit of the age
* We must be willing to endure and face any sacrifices and any sufferings that are necessary
* We must not be fearful or afraid in the face of controversy and opposition
* We must be courageous and conquer fear with faith in the power of God and His Son!
1. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/alone-against-the-mob> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John MacArthur, *Revelation 12-22*, 272-273. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B190220> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)