

Man Up!

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Lorain Avenue Church of Christ (04-06-2024)

Good morning.

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Our lesson this morning ... is titled "Man up!" (Ser Valiente)

Be courageous.

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Paul wrote to the saints at Ephesus ... Eph 6:10-11 ... "Finally ... be strong in the Lord ... and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God ... that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil."

Be strong ... "in the Lord." Be strong ... "in the strength of His might."

"If God is for us" ... he wrote in Rom 8:31 ... "who can stand against us?"

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13)

To Timothy he wrote ... 2 Tim 2:1 ... "You therefore, my son ... be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

God did not deliver us from sin through His Son ... just to have us sit back with our feet up. He delivered us to work ... to fight ... not sit.

Get up. Get in the fight. Don't be worried or afraid. God made the battle plans. God equips us. God is with us. He protects us. He gives us the advantage.

Be courageous. Be valiant"

In 2 Cor 5:4-9 ... Paul encourages us, while we fight the good fight for the Lord. Here on earth, in these temporary bodies ... "Be of good courage" ... God has prepared an eternal home for us in Heaven.

Be of good courage

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Peter wrote ... in 2 Pet 1:5-8 ... that ... if we want to make our entrance into Heaven sure ... there are seven things ... seven Godly characteristics ... qualities ... that must NOT BE lacking.

They are Virtue, Knowledge, Self-control, Perseverance, Godliness, Brotherly-Kindness, and Love

Let me expand on characteristics two through seven ... just a little bit. I'll circle back to characteristic number one later.

Peter says we must give all diligence ... all diligence ... to this endeavor.

After building "virtue" upon our faith, we must next build up our knowledge and understanding of God's inspired Word.

Quite often ... Christians become over-exuberant ... as they learn about the treasures that God has revealed in His Word. We have to think things carefully through. And so, Peter says we need to develop self-control and level-headedness as we apply what we're learning.

It takes time to sort through God's treasures and become God's workmen ... work men and women who need not be ashamed ... rightly diving the Word of Truth. And so ... we need enduring patience ... perseverance ... until we get it. In Wednesday Bible class ... we're learning about God's patterns and how to apply them. This is new to some. And it's neat to watch the light bulbs come on ... one after the other over a week or two ... "Now, I get it." "Now, I understand."

Knowledge and understanding must be used for the good ... and to the glory of God. Never for our own glory. When we teach ... it must be Christ coming through us. We are but vessels in God's hand. When Peter tells us to add godliness ... he's telling us to be humble and pious. There is no place for hubris in the life of a Christian. All the capability we're gaining must be used to shine the pure light of the Gospel out into the world. We must be holy for God is Holy. In His presence we are standing on holy ground. All of our growing capability makes it possible to advance the Gospel plan of salvation.

Now that we've worked on ourselves ... preparing ourselves ... we must now direct our energies outward to others. Peter tells us to abound in brotherly-kindness.

Love ... sacrificial love ... is the crowning characteristic. The love that God has shown to us ... is the love we must show to others ... The love we must return in kind to God.

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I have a specific goal in mind ... in calling out this key passage of scripture.

Yes ... Peter reminds us ... that failure to develop these vitally important characteristics of the Godhead ... is simply short-sighted.

Yet my goal is to talk about courage.

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I've expanded on godly characteristics two through seven.

Now ... the very first quality Peter tells us to add to our faith ... is "Virtue" (2 Pet 1:5). One translation reads ... "let your faith supply virtue."

Many folks teach that virtue is the same thing as goodness ... goodness from a pure heart.

But think about it. Are not the other six qualities all about the development of Christian character, patterned after Gods own heart?

Does it make sense to say “first ... add goodness” ... and add six other qualities” ... that essentially define the goodness of God?

The Greek work ... translated here in 2 Pet 1:5 as “virtue” ... means “manliness,” or “valor.” It’s referring to the moral quality that we associate with the expression ... “Man up!” It carries the idea of manliness ... because it takes extra strength to step up. The end-result is excellence. It means to courageously embark on the path to moral excellence.

When we read of a virtuous woman ... we are reading of a woman who has achieved a high level of moral excellence through courageous development.

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As we’ve seen ... God did not call us to Christ to become spectators. He called us to work. He called us to spiritual growth. He called us to strive for excellence.

And this takes courage and confidence.

If you have a good plan and no motivation. Nothing gets accomplished.

If you have motivation and a crummy plan, Nothing good comes out of it.

But ... but if you have a good plan AND motivation. Much good is accomplished.

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You can’t have a better set of plans than those God has furnished in His Word. Take Peter’s instruction in 2 Pet 1. Here God tells us how to share in the Divine nature ... making sure our entrance into Heaven.

Is that a grand plan or what? Grand in its origin and purpose. Grand in its scope.

Even more ... it’s Grand in what it requires of each of us ... individually. The effort. The unsureness at times. The unsettlement of new learnings ousting old ways. The “downs” that come between the “ups.” The days when nothing seems to work right. The doubts in ourselves at times. The occasional sins.

Learning about God and His ways is not a five page checklist. The basics come easy. They are simple by design. Deep in meaning yet simple to digest. The rest takes work.

Jesus never said there was NO work involved in following Him. He never said that there’s no “yoke.” But He DID say His yoke is easy to pull ... and His burden is light. Do-able ... unlike the burdens imposed on the Israelite brick-makers back in Egypt.

“Be strong in the Lord ... and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God ... that you may be able to stand firm,” Paul wrote.

“Timothy, my son ... be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

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Paul wrote to the church at Corinth ... 1 Cor 16:13 ... “Be on the alert ... stand firm in the faith ... act like men ... be strong.” As Peter said ... let your faith supply “Moral valor and courage.”

Let all that you do ... be done in love (Paul wraps up in 1 Cor 16:14). Just as Peter said ... and to brotherly-kindness, add love.”

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As God passed the torch of leadership from Moses to Joshua ...

... we read in Deut 31:6 ... "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at the enemies in the land of Canaan, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."

In Josh 2:11 ... Rahab said that the hearts of her people melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of the Israelites ... for the LORD their God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”

Consider then the opposite ... how great it is to be on the Lord’s side. Strong, courageous hearts.

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Consider the courage it took for Gideon to strike down all the idols and places of heathen worship ... that his own father had constructed in the land

Consider the courage it took for King Hezekiah to do the exact same thing, and then to stand up to Sennacherib ... the powerful Assyrian King ... refusing to surrender while trusting in God’s deliverance.

In Dan 10 ... an angel came to Daniel ... as he was deeply troubled ... having seen a vision of spectacular things to come ...

The angel said to Daniel ... "O man of high esteem, do not be afraid. Peace be with you; take courage and be courageous!"

Daniel recalled how ... as the angel spoke to him ... he received strength.

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Take courage and BE courageous. Act with valor. Act ... trusting the Lord.

This is what Peter is telling us. May your faith be strong enough to move you into action. Faith that never results in action ... is useless.

T.S. Elliot wrote a poem that goes something like this ...

“Do I dare disturb the universe? Have I the strength to force the moment to a crisis? I have known them all already. I’ve measured my life in coffee spoons. I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker. I have seen the eternal footman hold my coat and snicker. And in short, I was afraid.”

Secular poetry can’t hold a candle to the Word of the Lord ... but Elliot’s imagery sure grabs you by the throat.

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In most congregations ... larger ones for sure ...

You find all dispositions of men and women assembled in the pews on the Lord’s day.

Some are on mental holiday. Just sitting there ... minds on whatever makes them content. Vacationers.

Some are prisoners ... dragged in by parents ... husbands ... wives ... friends. If you look closely, you can tell they feel trapped. Like the prisoners in the old black and white movies ... banging their tin cups on the bars of their cells.

Quite a few have come ... simply to learn another fact ... like a trophy. To get another lesson book to put on their shelves at home ... or to display on their coffee tables. Sophisticates in the loose sense. Learning for the sake of learning. No intent at all of using what they’re learning.

[Dudley a fellow high-school ... planned his jig saw cuts for days on end ... just to escape having to work at something.]

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Thankfully though ... most folks are present to learn. They have the attitude of an explorer. Learning eagerly about the spiritual realm. Not afraid to strike out in a strange land. Not afraid to take a step when they can’t see the next steppingstone. Not afraid of work for long hours. Not afraid of making a mistake and learning from it. Not too full of themselves to let God lead and guide them.

These are the spiritual explorers. The learners. The ones growing and maturing. The ones that find more time ... make more time ... for God rather than for themselves.

These are the brave. The courageous.

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Peter is not asking us to add BANG ... courage ... to our faith in one huge chunk. Just as our faith grows stronger and stronger ... so does our courage. Our courage grows by exercising it.

When David stormed toward Goliath in full courage and strength ... do we suppose “that courage” just came upon him an hour or so earlier? NO!

Over the years ... with various God-given victories over wild animals ... David’s trust in the Lord grew. David’s faith was not just a bunch of words or untested thoughts. It was a solid trust in God. Confidence.

David came to know that ... if he followed God’s plan ... as scary as things might seem going in ... he would emerge victorious.

“Manning Up” is “easy” ... “easier” ... when you TRUST the process.

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Would you have the courage ... right now ... today ... to risk your family’s future ... by attempting to grow 50 or so acres of soybeans or corn? First time ever?

I wouldn’t. I would be scared to death if my whole livelihood and future depended on ... my current knowledge and experience of farming..

But the Wolff Brothers and their huge farm just south of us? Or the large farming operation at the corner of Abbeyville and Hamilton Roads? They jump right in every spring. Huge operations.

Do they get anxious at times. Weather, etc? Of course they do. But do they have the courage to begin every year?

YES.

How is this so?

They trust the process. Very much the same way as a cook trusts a recipe, but on a smaller scale of course,

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Peter says ... “begin it” ... begin with boldness and courage ... the spiritual maturity process he’s outlined in 2 Pet 1:5-8. Knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and love. Fully trusting in the process God has outlined.

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Let’s read Matt 14:24-30

Jesus’ Disciples had started across the Sea of Galilee without Him.

“Their boat was already far from the shore. A storm came up. The boat was being hammered by the waves. The wind was contrary.

And in the fourth watch of the night (between 3am and sunrise), Jesus came to them, walking on the sea.

And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were frightened, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out for fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.'

And Peter answered Him and said, 'Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.'

And He said, 'Come!' And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

But seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!'"

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I want us to understand the difference between faith that is "in our heads" (maybe even in our hearts, yet is untested ... untried?) ... and faith that moves us into action in service to the Lord.

There's an old illustration. A man pushed a wheel-barrow full of rocks across Niagara falls on a special tightrope. He went over and back ... a couple of times.

He asked the crowd if they thought he could go across and back again. They yelled out ... "YES!"

Are you sure" ... "YES!"

Then he looked at the faces in the crowd, and said "come across with me in my wheelbarrow then."

They all backed up ten paces. No takers.

They had weak faith. In short they had no trust. No courage. No valor.

There is a difference in faith "on paper." And faith "in practice." TRUST

I realize that the man with the wheel barrow was not God ... just a man that could fall.

But the principle is the same.

If our faith in God is sure. Then we trust God ... and we do as He asks, even when it takes courage.

If we don't "man up," we show NO trust in God. Our faith is weak.

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Isn't this what happened at Kadesh Barnea about a year after the Exodus from Egypt began? Even though the people claimed to have faith ... and had witnessed countless miracles ... they did not trust in God enough to carry them through the challenge of conquering Canaan.

When we choose to be spectators in the Christian life ... we offend God in the same way that the Israelites did. We show NO trust in His ways and promises.

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Not long before Jesus was arrested in the Garden ... His disciples were anxious and scared. Jesus was leaving them. They would be on their own.

This is what the Lord told them ... (John 16:32-33)

"Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

"Take courage" I've got this. Trust Me. You'll be more than okay.

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The prophet Malachi warned the people to stop offering trash sacrifices unto God.

God speaks through Malachi and says "Give Me the best you have. Give Me Mine first"

"And see ... that I will fill your storehouses to overflowing"

"You've never experienced this because you've never trusted Me enough to try it."

They had it backwards. We'll give after YOU give, God." But God said NO. I'll reward you after you give, not before. You DO NOT trust Me. You trust only in yourselves.

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We sing, "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus. Just to take Him at His word." Yet are there some who have never had the courage to demonstrate their trust in Jesus.

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1 Tim 4:8-10 ... "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."

1 Tim 6:17 ... "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

Psa 56:3 ... "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You."

2 Tim 1:12-13 ... "I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."

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Invitation ...

Isn't this what Ananias told Saul once he had seen the risen Savior and believed ... "What are you waiting for ... get up ... be baptized"

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