

Fear and Courage

Commentary for November 1, 2018 — Courage Overcomes Fear

Fear is widespread increasing in our modern time. Even when things go well there is often a fear that bad times will return soon. Fear of loss, fear of poverty, fear of most anything — all are based on the basic fear of our greatest and last enemy, death.

“Suicide in the Bible”¹ and “Fear in Scripture” are two articles for this month, both from Dr. Ernest Martin. As usual, read first the “[November 2018 Newsletter](#)” with additional information on the fear of death and the comfort that death will have no sting (1 Corinthians 15:54–57) affecting any human being once God gives glory to every human being. Keep this in mind: unless there is fear, there is no need for courage.

Fear of Death

Human beings were designed to fear death as we progress toward death. The moment we are born we begin our dying even as we are young and growing. One pagan philosopher had an opinion on death that is almost biblical, but not quite.

“Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are [alive], death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not [alive]. It is nothing, then, either to the living or to the dead, for with the living it is not and the dead exist no longer.”

• *Epicurus, [Letter to Menoecus](#)*

These words read as though they come from the Book of Ecclesiastes, but they do not. They came from Epicurus, a pagan Greek philosopher and founder of the school of philosophy called Epicureanism.² Sometimes even pagan philosophers tend toward the truth, but Epicurus’ truth is incomplete. Death is an evil. Death is to be feared.

Without Fear Courage Is Unnecessary

Adam and Eve had no reason to fear anything before they sinned. Remember, Adam was warned about the tree of good and evil before Eve was made from him:

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die.”

• *Genesis 2:17*

Adam and Eve had no idea what God meant by **“you shall surely die.”** Death meant nothing to them. How could they possibly know anything about death, even if it was explained to them: “Oh, in death you cease to exist.” They would not know that until after they sinned.

Also, only after their sin were they afraid. The idea of fear first appears in Scripture when Adam said, **“I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, [why?] because I was naked;**

¹ Suicide is a choice a person makes when other factors in life overcome the fear of death.

² “[Epicurus on Death](#),” my Commentary for September 2007.

and I hid myself” (Genesis 3:10). Because they had no concept of fear, they had no need for courage, **“the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty”** (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2018).

The situation was the same with Cain. It is likely no one thought to kill another member of the family of Adam — until Cain killed Abel. After the fruit incident, everyone sinned, yes, but Cain killing Abel was the first murder.³ Now everyone had more to fear. We are then told that wickedness and violence filled the earth”

“And YHWH saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, ‘The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.’”

• *Genesis 6:5, 11–13*

The people must have feared the pervasive wickedness. The earth was corrupt and violent. Adam’s descendants filled it with evil, having much to fear from each other. All participated except Noah and his family. All would fear YHWH’s wrath; all not in the ark would die.

Your Fears

You would not need to have courage if you were not afraid of anything. We fear things because we are flesh, which is frail, and each of us trends toward death. Death is the thing most people fear above all. James said this about life:

“For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.”

• *James 4:13–15*

James perhaps was commenting on what King David asked God:

“Let me know, O YHWH, my end, And the measure of my days — what it is, I would know how short-lived I am. Lo! as hand-breadths, have you granted my days, and my life-time, is as nothing before you, Surely, a mere breath, are all men, [even] such as stand firm. ... Surely as a shadow, does every man wander ... Now, therefore, for what have I waited, O My Lord? My hope, is, in you.”

• *Psalms 39:4–7, The Rotherham Bible*

Remember what Paul says, **“... we trust in the living God”** (1 Timothy 4:10). **“God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”** (2 Timothy 1:7). The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15:26).

David Sielaff
david@askelm.com

³ All first generation children came from Eve. Over the next 800 years after Seth was born Adam had sons and daughters (Genesis 5:4). He and Eve likely had daughters before then, but that is the first mention of daughters in Genesis. See also Genesis 6:1. Therefore Cain married one of his sisters or nieces (Genesis 4:17).