

May 22, 2022

Fan Into Flame – (week 5) Be Courageous

At age 26, Ken Elzinga joined the faculty of the University of Virginia. Just after a tenured colleague warned him that being explicit about his faith would hinder his career, Elzinga was stunned to see a poster with his face on it placed at a prominent campus location. A campus ministry had posted it to advertise a talk he had agreed to give. He had no idea it would be so public.

A relatively new believer, Elzinga worried. Would fellow professors think less of him? Would this harm his career? He experienced a long and troubling night. He returned to campus and secretly took the poster down. But the next morning, Elzinga put the poster back up. After hours of soul-searching, he concluded that his life was not about career ambition but about pleasing God, and that being private about his faith was not an option for a faithful follower of Jesus.

That was a turning point in his life that took place 55 years ago now and he is still a professor at the University of Virginia, having taught more students than any other professor in the history of the University.

When our aim is pleasing God we no longer need to compete for our own honor, and this loyalty to God above all else makes us less anxious, less sensitive to criticism, and more courageous.

based on a Christianity Today article in (July/August 2014)

Not all stories of courage end so well. Paul's story didn't. He was about to be executed and he knew it. *Who would fill his shoes?* Paul eased his own mind and the mind of others when he wrote that God was able to guard the Gospel. Paul's loyalty to God above all else gave him peace and courage.

Moral courage is the ability to act rightly in the face of popular opposition, shame, scandal, discouragement, or personal loss.

–Courage, Wikipedia

- **In AD 64**, Paul and the church found moral courage.

- In 1967, Ken Elzinga found moral courage and it made all the difference for his 55 years teaching.
- In 2022, we followers of Jesus must also find our moral courage to act rightly in the face of opposition, shame, discouragement, or personal loss.

BE COURAGEOUS:

1. There will be **TERRIBLE TIMES** ahead

2 Timothy 3:1 (NIV) But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.

What does that look like? Paul tells us.

2 Timothy 3:2-5 (NIV) People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power....

“Lovers of themselves” begins the list, and the list ends with “rather than lovers of God”. Everything in between those bookends is the terrible result of such a horrible trajectory in life.

It's always best to function according to design, and we have been designed to function as God centered beings. We unravel to the point of self-destruction we live like self-centered beings.

Paul did not give us this list to describe atheists. He was describing false followers.

2 Timothy 3:5 (NIV) having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

Please note that when he said “have nothing to do with such people”, he was not meaning people of the world, but “imposters” in the church who claimed to be followers of Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:13 (NIV) while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

In contrast to those holding to a “*form of godliness*” but “*denying its power*” (v. 5), true godliness is EMPOWERED by God’s Spirit because of our relationship with Jesus.

These “*evildoers and imposters*” have only a religious false front.

2 Timothy 3:6-7 (NIV) They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, (3:7) always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

WARNING: “Imposters” in the church are a great danger to those in the church who are constantly doing Bible Studies, “*always learning*”, but never really getting it, because they measure spiritual maturity by their newly learned “*information*” instead of by their “*transformation.*”

Are you merely learning information and “*denying its power*” or are you living out your relationship with Jesus through EMPOWERED obedience by the Holy Spirit Jesus supplies?

2 Timothy 3:8-9 (NIV) . . . They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. 9 But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

We must not hang out with “*evildoers and imposters*” (v. 13) who claim to be Christian but whose lives contradict the gospel. “*Have nothing to do with such people*” (v. 5).

2. Faithful followers will be PERSECUTED

2 Timothy 3:10-13 (NIV) You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, 11 persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. 12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will

*be persecuted,*¹³ while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

If you want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, you will be persecuted. (v. 12)

Paul gets this from Jesus himself and sound reasoning.

JESUS:

Matthew 10:22 (NIV) You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

SOUND REASONING:

- Anyone who accepts a set of moral standards quite different from the world's is bound to encounter trouble.
- Anyone who has a loyalty that surpasses all other earthly loyalties will clash with those who do not like our refusal to compromise that loyalty.
- Anyone compelled by love to speak about Jesus, who is the only rescue from the judgment to come, will encounter those who will hate them for it instead of love them for it!

If you want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, you will be persecuted!

If we have *not* experienced persecution, could it be that we have been neglecting our duty as disciples of Jesus by being too cautiously private about our faith?

If you don't have courage, what do you do?

3. Become thoroughly EQUIPPED

*2 Timothy 3:14-17 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known **the Holy Scriptures,** which are able to make you wise for **salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.**¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking,*

*correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be **thoroughly equipped** for every good work.*

“Courage is contagious. When one brave person takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened.”

Billy Graham, "A Time for Moral Courage" Reader's Digest (July 1964).

Be the one brave person! Let's take the Gospel and let's pass it on!

1. Love God wholeheartedly
2. Do first things first
3. Don't do life alone
4. Saved people serve people
5. Followers say Follow Me!

Talk It Over

SMALL TALK

1. In what ways does the world and culture in which we live deceive people and encourage *evil* desires?

VIEWPOINT

2. **READ 2 Timothy 3:1-5.** Given the list of vices, what “form of godliness” (v. 5) could these people possibly exhibit?
3. **READ 2 Timothy 3:6-17.** What were some other characteristics Paul told Timothy to watch out for? What helps us recognize “evildoers and imposters” (v. 13) in our midst?
4. Should a truly godly person expect persecution (v. 12)? Why or why not?

GETTING PERSONAL

5. When are you most tempted to put on an external show of religion that hides the true condition of your heart?
6. Does v. 5 (with the rest of this passage) urge you to think about disassociating yourself from any particular person?
7. What specific sinful attitude or behavior do you need to ask God to help you overcome this week?

MAKING PROGRESS (THIS WEEK)

8. Paul’s list describes “lovers of themselves” (v. 2) “rather than lovers of God” (v. 5) and the kind of problems caused by this basic sin problem. What can you do this week to get a firm grip on VVCC’s 5 core statements listed below, especially the first core statement which makes all of them work.
 1. Love God wholeheartedly
 2. Do first things first
 3. Don’t do life alone
 4. Saved people serve people
 5. Followers say Follow Me!