

## **The High Cost of Cowardice**

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*God's people must not collapse or compromise in the face of the fear and intimidation that dominate the world. We believe this series, first published in February of 2019, is a timely reminder that cowardice is contrary to authentic Christian living, and that Christians should find courage and confidence in the truth of God's Word. —ed.*

When you think of courageous Christians, your mind likely runs to the heroes of church history. You think of the men and women who endured imprisonment, torture, and even martyrdom for the sake of their faith. And certainly there are many places around the world where believers still face similar threats today.

But that's not the context in which most of us live and work. What does courageous Christianity look like in our day-to-day lives?

That question has been on my mind since late last year, when controversy swirled around a statement made by contemporary Christian recording artist Lauren Daigle. During a radio interview, she was asked, "Do you feel that homosexuality is a sin?" Here's how she replied:

You know what, I can't honestly answer on that, in the sense of, I have too many people that I love that, they are homosexual. I don't know. I actually had a conversation with someone last night about it, and I was like, "I can't say one way or the other. I'm not God." So when people ask questions like that, that's what my go-to is. Like, I just say, read the Bible and find out for yourself. And when you find out, let me know, because I'm learning too.

Let me say at the outset that it is not my goal to condemn Lauren Daigle. As my (professed) sister in Christ, I am obligated to be charitable in my efforts to understand her remarks in the context in which they were offered. I cannot read her mind or her heart as to motive or intent. And I can only imagine the contempt she has endured, having disappointed many of her fans and other Christians by not answering the question as dogmatically as they had hoped. It is against this backdrop that I unreservedly and wholeheartedly give Lauren Daigle the benefit of the doubt that she is, as she said, still learning—as should be true of every Christian (Romans 12:2).

Nevertheless, I must confess that I am burdened by the fact that Daigle—or any professing Christian, for that matter—would be so ambiguous on an issue about which Scripture speaks unequivocally (Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:25-27).

After spending no small amount of time prayerfully and—I hope—graciously reflecting on Daigle's words, I was reminded of a sobering eschatological reality in Scripture—one that is germane to the subject of courageous Christianity, but of which many believers, sadly, are unfamiliar. It is the reality that those whose lives are marked by cowardice are identified first among those destined to perish in the lake of fire.

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. (Revelation 21:8)

God regards spiritual cowardice as a damnable sin—one that exposes a heart of unbelief. In his commentary on Revelation, John MacArthur explains who these cowards are.

These are the ones who lack endurance (cf. Matthew 24:13; Mark 8:35). 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). These are the ones who “shrink back to destruction” (Hebrews 10:39).[1] John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Revelation 12–22* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2000), 272–73.

Biblically speaking, “the cowardly” are professing believers who are so overcome with fear and timidity in a given situation that they equivocate on the truth, or deny it altogether. Like Peter (Matthew 26:69–75), spiritual cowards yield to the world’s pressure, fearful of what an uncompromising life of standing for Christ and His gospel might cost them. Those pressures are familiar to us all—they routinely weigh on our friendships, family gatherings, and workplace conversations. And in a society that is driven by the ever-shifting winds of political correctness, we all understand the potentially high price of nonconformity.

For followers of Christ, the question is not *if* but *when* we will be rejected for standing for the truth (John 15:18). Such treatment is both a natural and expected response to a message the unbelieving world does not want to hear (John 3:19). And yet, we must not lose heart. In fact—we are to rejoice (Luke 6:22), knowing that we serve a courageous Savior who, by the power of His Spirit, has equipped us to live courageously as well (Psalm 31:24; 2 Timothy 1:7).

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