

Virtue

We are to add virtue to our faith, the foundation of our relationship with God (2 Pet. 1:5; cf. Heb. 11:6). Virtue (Greek, arete) is defined as, "any excellence of a person...or of a thing, an eminent endowment, property or quality...a virtuous course of thought, feeling and action; virtue, moral goodness...any particular moral excellence, as modesty, purity..." (Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament). The definition gives us an idea of what we are to be, but examples will make it more concrete.

David's stand against Goliath shows us moral excellence (1 Sam. 17). He understood Goliath's curses were not just against Israel, but God, and it offended him. David took action when others were unwilling to do so, and thereby gained victory for Israel.

Esther also exhibited virtue as she appeared before the king (Est. 4). Though she did not go to war, she did put her life in jeopardy. Through her actions the Jews were spared a terrible slaughter.

We can also call to mind Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who faced death because of their rebellion against the king's decrees (Dan. 3, 6). They refused to forsake and violate their duty to God. As a result, their moral courage has been a familiar example to children and adults throughout the ages.

Stephen possessed virtue along with many other good traits (Acts 6:5, 8). He was willing to stand before the powerful and expose their sin (Acts 7). Stephen's moral excellence led him to pay the ultimate sacrifice--no doubt, without regret.

How did these have such strong virtue? Faith! Their belief in God and His word gave them the basis for moral courage. In fact, 2 Peter 1:5 in the New American Standard Bible says, "...in your faith supply moral excellence..." It takes faith in God to build virtue in you. If you fall short in moral goodness, it is because you fall short in faith.

Build your faith and you will increase your virtue (cf. Rom. 10:17). You will be able to face giants, lions, fiery furnaces, mortal danger and even death with moral courage. You will set an example for others to follow. And, most importantly, you will honor God.

Steven F. Deaton