

# Step 21 on Unmanly and Puerile Cowardice.

by St. John Climacus

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*Cowardice is a childish disposition that can be overcome through faith, prayer, and a contrite heart.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 27:1, Proverbs 29:25, Isaiah 41:10, 2 Timothy 1:7, 1 John 4:18

**Topics:** "Overcoming Fear", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

St. John Climacus emphasizes the dangers of cowardice and fear, highlighting how they stem from vainglory and unbelief, leading to a lack of faith and conviction. He encourages believers to confront their fears through prayer, relying on the strength of Jesus' name as a powerful weapon against fear. St. John Climacus teaches that overcoming cowardice is a gradual process that requires mourning over one's weaknesses and accepting unexpected events with a contrite heart, ultimately leading to a life dedicated to God.

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## Transcript

1. If you pursue virtue in a monastery or community, you are not likely to be attacked much by fear. But the man who spends his time in more solitary places should make every effort to avoid being overcome by that offspring of vainglory, that daughter of unbelief, cowardice.
2. Cowardice is a childish disposition in an old, vainglorious soul. Cowardice is a falling away from faith that comes of expecting the unexpected.
3. Fear is a rehearsing of danger beforehand; or again, fear is a trembling sensation of the heart, alarmed and troubled by unknown misfortunes. Fear is a loss of conviction.
4. A proud soul is a slave of cowardice; it vainly trusts in itself, and is afraid of any sound or shadow of creatures.
5. Those who mourn over their sins but are insensible to every other sorrow do not feel cowardice, but the cowardly often have mental breakdowns. And this is natural. For the Lord rightly forsakes the proud<sup>1</sup> that the rest of us may learn not to be puffed up.
6. Although all cowardly people are vainglorious, yet not all who are unafraid are humble, since even robbers and grave-plunderers may be without fear.

7. Do not hesitate to go late at night to those places where you usually feel afraid. But if you yield only a little to such weakness, then this childish and ridiculous infirmity will grow old with you. As you go on your way, arm yourself with prayer. When you reach the place, stretch out your hands. Flog your enemies with the name of Jesus, for there is no stronger weapon in heaven or earth. When you get rid of the disease (of fear), praise Him who has delivered you. If you continue to be thankful, He will protect you for ever.

8. Just as it is impossible to satisfy the stomach in one bout, so also it is impossible to overcome fear instantly. It will yield more quickly in proportion as you mourn; but to the extent that our mourning fails, we continue to be cowards.

9. My hair and my flesh shuddered<sup>2</sup> said Eliphaz, when describing the malice of the demon. Sometimes the soul, and sometimes the flesh, turns coward first, and the one passes its infirmity on to the other. If this untimely fear does not pass into the soul when the flesh flinches, then deliverance from the disease is at hand. But the actual freedom from cowardice comes when we eagerly accept all unexpected events with a contrite heart.

10. It is not darkness and loneliness of place that gives the demons power against us, but barrenness of soul. And through God's providence this sometimes happens in order that we may learn by it.

11. He who has become the servant of the Lord will fear his Master alone, but he who does not yet fear Him is often afraid of his own shadow.

12. In the presence of an invisible spirit the body becomes afraid; but in the presence of an angel the soul of the humble is filled with joy. Therefore, when we recognize the presence from the effect, let us quickly hasten to prayer, for our good guardian has come to pray with us.

He who has conquered cowardice has clearly dedicated his life and soul to God.

1 Cf. St. Matthew xxvii, 46.

2 Job iv, 15.

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