

When Does a Boy Become a Man?

There have been rites of passage that differing cultures believe bring a boy into the fraternity of manhood. The Kenyans of Africa will equip an eleven-year-old boy with nothing but his bare necessary clothing and a solitary spear to go on his first lion hunt. The taking of a lion is their threshold of entry into manhood. When he is around twelve years of age in Judaism, a boy memorizes sections of the Torah (the Law of God) and with his prayer shawl around his shoulders will recite in committal before his family and rabbi to become a man. There was a long period of silence between the birth of the Lord Jesus and the time he was twelve. Do you notice what He was doing at twelve? He was astounding the doctors of the Law with His knowledge of the Scriptures. Perhaps our Lord was beginning His initiating rites into manhood according to the custom that is still with the Jew to this day at the Barmitspah. In the American Indian culture of the Lakota, the rite of passage occurred as early as eleven when a boy would enter the sweat tent and through the night the superstitious belief that he was being purged took place. Then after this ritual, his chest was pierced with needles and attached string. The string was tied to a tree or pole and he is lifted up. When the string breaks through the flesh he is initiated. I am sure our young men attending our FLY Conference today are glad we are not following the Lakota custom. In the days of ancient England when a highborn boy became seven, he was sent to the castle of a lord, usually a close friend of the father or relative. Around the age of thirteen he was apprenticed to a knight. Then usually between eighteen and twenty-one the squire would spend a night fasting and confessing his sins. In the morning the lord of the castle would ask the young man what were his reasons for wanting to become a knight. If his answers were deemed worthy and honorable, the initiation event would take place. If he passed the test, the attending knights and ladies would then dress him in new armour and he would kneel before the lord. The lord would tap him lightly on the shoulders three times and make a short declaration such as, "In the name of God and Saint George, I make thee a knight." Knights were expected to have a willingness to fight with bravery for a righteous cause, be chivalrous, uphold the honor of ladies and protect the weak. The effect of this ancient English custom is still with us today. We often look at a boy entering manhood at twenty-one. But our American youth usually begin to declare it eighteen. This is reminiscent of the ages of the rite of passage as a knight, eighteen to twenty-one.

I Timothy 4: 12 says, "*Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*" In these words we can see the great apostle encouraging his young "spiritual squire" to step up into spiritual manhood. In Ephesians 4:15, the Bible says, "*But speaking the truth in love, may **grow up into** him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.*" In the study of Bible numerics, we see the number six is the number of man (Revelation 13:18). Let us therefore take these six admonitions of letting no man despise our youth and use these as lines of demarcation that declare our Christian rite of passage into manhood. "*Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers....*"

1. In Word.

We see "word" in I Timothy 4:12 is the Greek word, *Logos*. This is the same Greek word used for the Bible. It is also the name assigned to our Lord (John 1:1). Psalm 19:14 says, "*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*" A wonderful goal for a young man would be to commit great passages of Scripture to heart. Psalm 119:9 says, "*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.*" When a delinquent or troubled youth came to Roloff Homes, the first and foremost requirement was to commit long passages of Scripture to heart. This was a form of purifying their young hearts and minds from the pollution in which they have been involved. I like the philosophy of Truett Cathy, Christian businessman and founder of Chick-fil-A said, "It's better to build boys than mend men." Instead of waiting to go delinquent or prodigal, why not get your word lined up with God's Word. Hide the Word in your heart as preventive maintenance. The first step to becoming a man is becoming a

responsible man of the Book.

2. In Conversation

The old school definition of conversation means “manner of conducting oneself in the world.” Rick Martin, missionary to the Philippine Islands asked me when he was still in college, “What is the number one thing your dad taught you growing up?” Without hesitation, I answered, “Obedience to the unenforceable.” This is doing right when there is no human around to make you do right. Paul said it like this, “*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence...*” (Philippians 2:12). This is a great way to test Christian manhood; will we do right with Christ’s glory as our sole motivation? If we have to continually be made to do right, we haven’t arrived.

3. In Charity

Christianity owns the word charity. It is the Greek word *agape*, which is God’s love, the highest form of love. The first time it is mentioned in the Bible was in the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Bible. This first occurrence was given in The Song of Solomon, where the love between husband and wife is given for example. It was understood by early Christians, and hopefully by Christians of this era, that we are to love not only God with *agape*, but also we are to love our wife, when we are married with that same kind of love. We are safe in saying a mark of true manhood is when a man loves his wife in faithfulness, truth and permanence. “*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*” (Ephesians 5:25).

4. In Spirit

The Bible says, “*The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly*” (Proverbs 20:27). We have used the term: He has “*esprit de corps*.” This is in reference to enthusiasm and morale. It is the power from within that stirs you to action. In the Garden of Eden, man’s spirit became alienated from God. When we are born again, our spirit within becomes activated into the Christ-life by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. God commands us to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). A boy becomes a man when he relinquishes his right to direct and control himself and turns his spirit over to God to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. This is the highest way of living “*esprit de corps*.”

5. In Faith

It’s okay for boys to borrow faith until we have our own. But if we are to become a man, we must own it. Let us go beyond the memorization of the Scripture, Apostle’s Creed and indoctrination. We need to know what we believe and then believe it! It is called by Jude, “*...the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude, verse 3)*.”

6. In Purity

In the legend of *The Knights of the Round Table*, we see that Sir Galahad, above all the other knights, was the one to find the Holy Grail in the famous search. The reason he was able to find it was because his heart was pure. The vision of the mystic cup of Joseph of Arimathea, which was used (in myth) in the original Lord’s Supper and that which also (according to legend) held the blood of our Savior, could only be seen by pure eyes. Moving from myth to legend we have this promise from Christ Himself, “*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God*” (Matthew 5:8).

When our Christian young men truly enter the realm of manhood they have conquered their most

trying foe...themselves. *“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city”* (Proverbs 16:32). This conference is hosted to encourage you to hear God’s voice with clarity, resist the bid of the world, flesh, and the Devil, and respond to God’s call on your life! When we are purified, an amazing blessing occurs, *“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded”* (James 4:8). Then James follows up by giving us the result of purifying our hearts and drawing near to God: *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up”* (James 4:10). Give your all to God and let Him lift and place you where He wants you to be in this world that needs you to “FLY” into service for the glory of our Lord!

- Pastor Pope -

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