

Younger Men -2



Paul wants to build up church life in Crete. He turns to God's Old Testament instruction and to Jesus' example to consider what gifts the Lord has given to His church and what this example needs to look like in practice. Jesus of Nazareth was THE (young) Man, who fully lived according to God's intent at revealed in Paradise, and whose example others were to follow. It is this material Paul now unpacks as he tells Titus to "urge the younger men to be...."

Sober-minded

The term Paul uses to describe what young men are to be is difficult to translate. The NIV and the ESV render it with the term 'self-controlled'; the NKJV has 'sober-minded'; the NASB has 'sensible'. The same term appears in Mark 5:15 in relation to the demoniac after the pigs, driven by the demons that used to possess the man, drowned in the sea; the locals found the man "in his right mind". In Romans 12:3 Paul instructs his readers "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with *sober judgment*."

The point is this. God created "young men" to "rule over" all creatures, including the self. With the fall into sin, young men (and all people) became slaves to sin so that Satan ruled over us. Christ, however, perfect *man* that He was, conquered sin and Satan and so brought salvation for all people (Titus 2:11). Sin, then, is no longer our master, no more than the exorcised demons were now master of the demoniac of Mark 5. Instead, Christ has poured out His Spirit so that we can be again the *men* God wants us to be.

Men are meant to embrace responsibility. The victory of Christ has given renewed opportunity to embrace responsibility. Paul would have Titus urge younger men to take seriously the victory of Jesus Christ as they make decisions day by day about what to do. They are, in other words, to think of themselves with the 'sober judgment' that comes with believing the gospel of Calvary: since you are no longer slaves to sin –that's real!– but once again God's possession through Jesus Christ –that's reality, too!– you don't *have* to give in to sin and temptation, you *can* resist the evil one. Factoring that victory into one's decision-making process is being *sober-minded*, and yes, it leads to a life of *self-control*.

Vs 12

Vs 12 logically follows, and works out what this level-headedness looks like in the midst of life's temptations. Christ's victory "train[s] us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age." And yes, the word translated as self-controlled in vs 12 is the same critical word as the apostle used in vs 6 about the younger men needing to be "self-controlled", "sober-minded", level-

headed, realistic. Christ has broken Satan's back; let "younger men" factor that reality into their decisions. That's taking responsibility properly.

I do need to add: "the present age" is *not* a reference to the younger years where one might think it okay to give in to sinful urges, and just live it up; this present age is instead the time before Christ's return in glory (see vs 13). His victory on the cross guarantees the final great act of history, the day when He comes to judge the living and the dead. That reality again prompts the "young man" to a particular level-headedness as he factors this return into the decisions he makes – whether driving his car, spending his money, raising his family, deciding on his recreation, etc, etc.

Crete

This sort of life-style represented a huge challenge for the younger men on Crete. The culture of the island is caught in that proverb Paul earlier quoted with agreement: "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (1:12). It's a mindset that encourages the more energetic to do whatever they feel like doing. With the Christian faith new to the island, the "younger men" had few role models to look up to.

That's why Paul told Titus that he needed to be a good example for these young men. Vs 7: "show yourself in all respects to be a model of good work, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned." Titus was the apostle's "true child in a common faith" (Titus 1:4), and that's to say that Titus learned how to do the Christian life, and teach it too, from the apostle himself. As preacher on the island, and young man at that, Titus needed to be aware that other young Christian men on Crete would be watching how Titus himself lived out the gospel of Christ's victory in his daily responsibilities. His own way of factoring-in-Christ's-triumph in his daily decisions needed to demonstrate that he said 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and instead give himself to good works. More, his teaching couldn't have the empty ring of liars' big talk (cf 1:10), but needed to exude integrity, dignity and soundness.

Here is a reality true for every preacher/teacher of all times, indeed true of all office bearers and leaders. Anyone entrusted with the task of preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ's victory needs be aware of his role as a model of Christian living. Brothers, we are created and recreated to image God, and so to rule over whatever God has entrusted to our care in the same way as the Lord does it. Christ Jesus emptied Himself for the sake of His bride, the church. As teachers and preachers of this good news, we must –if we wish the gospel to be credible– obviously factor in the reality of Christ's victory into all our conduct and our words.

Vital Role

What, then, is the vital role Paul sees for younger men in building up church life, be it on Crete, be it in Canada? Younger men are to take seriously whatever responsibility God gives them (be it for a vehicle, a house, a wife, children, themselves, work, etc) and *consistently factor in the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross* as they make decisions pertaining to the responsibilities God has given. Then there's no place for ungodliness, and plenty of place for godly lives. Such a life-style advertises the church wonderfully.

What do we see of today's younger men in the churches? From teens to 50s, are these men making responsible decisions, and so contributing positively to church life?

There is, I'm convinced, so very much for which to be thankful on this point. We see young men making profession of faith, finding a godly wife, having children according to the command of the Lord in Genesis 1, and presenting these children for baptism. We see younger men devoted to their wives and families, and stretching themselves for service in God's kingdom. It's reason for gratitude.

We also see younger men who do not stretch themselves as much as possible for the greater glory of the Lord God. We see some younger brothers content with a basic job, come home from work and chill in front of TV or on the internet, and some too who pour themselves into sport. There is nothing wrong with sport, nor with relaxing in front of the TV, or even doing simply a hands' on job. But there is a problem if one spends no time or energy to grow one self for increased responsibility tomorrow. It's for responsibility that God created men, and so men *must* read, study, prepare for leadership roles tomorrow.

Manhood is not to be measured by how much hair you can grow, or how big a truck you can drive, or how much beer you can drink, or how good you are on your skates, or how big a fish you can catch. Without knocking any of these things, none of them catch what God created *men* to do.

What God wants of *men* is that we *embrace responsibility*, to the point that we work with Christ's victory in every decision we make - 24/7. What that looks like?? It *follows the example of Jesus Christ* in His self-emptying for His bride. He is *the younger man* who took responsibility for those God entrusted to His care, ie, people God gave Him, and so laid down His life for His own. That's the sensible, sober-minded, levelheaded example the Lord gives us.

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