

# Younger Men -1

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Paul was determined to build up church life on the island of Crete – and saw a distinct role for the younger men to play. So he told Titus to “urge the younger men to be sober-minded” (Titus 2:6, NKJV). It makes an intriguing thought: would Paul actually ascribe a vital role to young men? Don’t you need maturing and age to count for anything in the church??

## Age limits

The phrase “younger men” contrasts with Paul’s earlier reference to “older men” (vs 2). We understand that the term “older men” refers to men who have been around longer than average, while the term “younger men” would then refer to those who have spent less time in the school of life. Though the upper age limit of this latter group might be hard to pin down, we feel confident to put the lower limit somewhere in the 20 to 25 year range. In our culture we’re not accustomed to talking about too much responsibility for those younger than that....

## Adolescents?

Scripture, it turns out, knows two main age brackets in a person’s lifetime: children and adults. In keeping with this distinction of Scripture, western society (and indeed most societies of the world) has long accepted that a person was either a child (with limited expectations and responsibility) or an adult. Two or three generations ago, however, western culture imported a third grouping between children and adults, namely, adolescents.

An adolescent typically has the strength and energy of an adult, and in many ways the freedoms and opportunities of adults too, but at the same time has the responsibilities of a child. We might say: they’re boys who shave. We’ve come to accept that this is the age when one does dumb things, but we’ll forgive them because, hey, they’re still kids-at-heart. There’s even a subgroup today known as “kidults”; these are the 20-somethings who don’t want responsibility, and so keep living at home, have Mom still make their lunch and do their laundry while they float from job to job....

This third grouping is simply not Scriptural. In God’s eyes teenagers are responsible for their conduct (as is a tween!), and needs to repent of sin as much as, say, any 50 year old. The Bible simply does not know of a ‘boy’ who ‘shaves’. In the Bible, if you are no longer a child you are a man, be it ‘young man’. That’s the bottom end of the age group Paul addresses in the passage quoted above. He has in mind any male who is not a child and not yet an “older man”.

## Source

Paul's instruction to Titus in relation to "younger men" did not come out of the blue. As in all his teaching, he built on God's earlier revelation, be it in the Old Testament, be it through Jesus Christ. Consider first the instruction from Genesis, then the instruction from Jesus Christ.

## Paradise

Adam was surely no child when God created him, and surely no old man either. In the eye of our minds we see Adam in Paradise as a "younger man" of some 20, 25, 30 years old, in the prime of strength and ability. Notice, then, what responsibilities God expected him to satisfy.

- He was to *image God* (Genesis 1:26). Just as the almighty Creator was loving and just and holy and kind and generous, so Adam was to be loving and just and holy and kind and generous. Creatures, angels, even God Himself should be able to see in the young man Adam something of what God was like.
- In second place, he was to *rule over* all creation (Genesis 1:26). This young man received a kingly function, with all creatures under his dominion. Please note: God did not let Adam hang around for many years until he was older and/or wizedened through a lifetime of experience before all creation was placed under his feet. Right away God put him in the Garden with the mandate to "work" it and "keep" it (Genesis 2:15). The term "keep" describes the function of protecting the Garden from enemies – and God knew full well that Satan would attack the Garden through his insidious temptation. Yet God entrusted the Garden to the care of this young man!
- Further, the young man Adam was told to be *fruitful* (Genesis 1:28). We realize that the command to be fruitful does not refer simply to making babies, but includes the responsibility of raising the children so that the next generation has learned how to image God and be effective rulers of God's world too.
- God said too that it was not good for the man to be alone, and so God created a woman to be "helper" to the man (Genesis 2:18). The man in turn was to accept the helper God gave him, and give her leadership and protection.

God's instructions to Adam in Genesis 1, then, point up that Adam was expected to *embrace responsibility*. Young men of subsequent generations were, obviously, to do the same. The Biblical picture of young manhood, then, is not characterized by loafing or playing games, let alone letting things happen.... Rather, a Biblically faithful man welcomes responsibility and takes initiative. This is what older men are to impress on the younger, and what older women are to teach younger women to insist of their husbands.

## Fall

The fall into sin made carrying out this glorious responsibility immeasurably difficult. Work became a slog and a burden (Genesis 3:19). Weeds appeared not just in gardens and fields (Genesis 3:18), but also in one's character and in inter-personal relations. Tensions characterized marriage (Genesis 3:16b), and children would reduce a man to tears (Genesis 4). We well understand that the Preacher describes all as vanity, a burden, a groan (Ecclesiastes 1:2). "What has a man from all his toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 2:22). The creature fashioned to image God, rule over God's world, and raise more image-bearers bumps into so much frustration.... How embarrassing for a creature endowed with such glorious responsibility!

## Understood

Despite the destructive effects of the fall into sin, several figures of the Old Testament demonstrate that they fully understood God's intent for young men. Consider the following:

- Joseph was 17 years old when his father sent him to check up on how his brothers were faring as they tended the family flocks (Genesis 37:2). He was also, then, 17 years old when he was sold as a slave to Egypt. As a young man he ended up in Potiphar's house – and so readily embraced responsibility that his master “put him in charge of all that he had” (Genesis 39:4). Not too many years later, perhaps in his early 20s, Joseph was imprisoned “where the king's prisoners were confined (39:20), yet took the initiative to embrace whatever responsibility rolled his way – and so “the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners” (39:22). He took control of his feelings so that he did not waste his energy with being angry with his brothers or full of pity for himself. When his family came to Egypt 20 years after he was sold, he was still a relatively “young man” of 37 – but ruler over the entire country.
- David was a teenager when he was entrusted with his father's sheep. As a teenager he fought off a lion and a bear, and was called to play the lyre to King Saul. As a “youth” he volunteered to fight Goliath (1 Samuel 17:42). In his 20s he led Israel out to battle as Saul's commander, then fled from Saul and, though persecuted, refused to kill him. Young though he was, he understood what manhood was about; he embraced responsibility and so made hard decisions. By the time he was 30, he was king over God's people Israel.
- Daniel was a young man, likely yet a teenager, when he was taken as prisoner to Babylon. Young though he was, he took a stand against the unclean food the palace proscribed (Daniel 1:8ff). Again, in his youth he used the opportunities he received to learn what he could learn. So, when God elevated him as a very man to a position of power and leadership in a foreign land, he was ready for the challenge.

These three young men acted in line with God's expectation as revealed in Paradise. They understood that youth was not a time for loafing, nor a time to live off others; being young men meant that they were to embrace responsibility to image God and rule over what was entrusted to them – especially *themselves*.

## Jesus

*The* Biblical example of what a “young man” was to look like is none else than Jesus of Nazareth. He was “like his brothers in every respect,” and that includes the reluctance some have to embrace responsibility. But the Scripture says of this young man that though He was tempted in every respect as we are, He never gave Himself to sin (Hebrews 4:15). That's to say that in His teenage years, and in His 20s too, He made it His business to image God in all He did, and made it His business too to rule over whatever God entrusted to His care – including first of all *Himself*, be that in guarding His mouth or restraining His sexual urges.

At 30 years of age –truly a young man still!– He took up His public ministry in Israel, preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, healing the sick and raising the dead. In the process He denied Himself for the benefit of those the Father entrusted to Him, even embracing the cursed cross and the heavy judgment of God for the benefit of the undeserving. Herein He demonstrated precisely what God intended for all men back in Paradise already; they are to embrace responsibility, and so take initiative to further the Lord's kingdom.

Paul drew out for the Ephesians what this means for men. “Husbands, love your wives, *as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her*, that he might sanctify her.... *In the same*

way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies..." (5:25ff). Jesus' embrace of the responsibility that belongs to being a man means that "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people" (Titus 2:11). Jesus is THE (young) Man, whose example all men are to follow.

### Titus

I'll draw out next time, DV, what consequences follow in Paul's instruction to Titus.

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