



## Strength of youth

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# A man of character

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For a young man to be what God calls him to be, he must be a man of high character.

The mention of character sounds strange to the modern ear. It makes us think of some long-forgotten, more formal era. The worldly man is not concerned with character, and the examples of men in the media today are the farthest thing from men of character.

This makes it all the more urgent that the Christian young man be a man of character. The character about which he is so concerned is a set of spiritual attributes graciously given him by God. Having received them from God, the man of God then carefully cultivates and diligently develops them in his life.

There is certainly more that could be said, but here I want to mention three aspects of a godly man's character: sobriety, wisdom, and compassion.

### Sober

A man of character is a man who is sober. In Titus 1:6 Paul tells pastor Titus, "Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded." The word translated "sober minded" means literally to have a sound mind or to be in one's right mind.

We are not dealing here with literal drunkenness, with beer, whiskey, rum, or vodka, with kegs and parties. And yet this is a helpful way of illustrating what the Bible means when it speaks of being sober. Think of a man who is drunk. Looking either to find a good time or to lose a bad memory at the bottom of the brown bottle, he's drunk himself into a stupor. His mind is in a thick fog. He's not thinking clearly. He's unstable, undisciplined, and out of control. He's as far from having a sober mind as possible.

From a spiritual point of view, the opposite of being sober minded is to be spiritually drunk. It means that our minds are in a fog. We are unstable, undisciplined, and out of control. But the one whose mind is clear, who is disciplined and in control, is the man with a sober mind.

How does one get a sober mind? It is a gift of God's grace. The fact that we are conceived totally depraved means that we are characterized by "blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment" (Canons III/IV, 1). In regenerating us, God "powerfully illuminates [our] minds by His Holy Spirit, that [we] may rightly understand and dis-

cern the things of the Spirit of God” (Canons III/IV, 11).

We grow in having a sound mind especially through our hearing of, reading, studying, and meditating on the Word of God. God’s Word teaches us reality, what is true of Him and of the world that He made. We can only have a sound mind if our thinking is guided and directed by His Word.

If a man has a sound mind, that will show itself in his life. The word for “sober minded” can also mean that a person exercises self-control. The way that we think and the things we believe dictate how we will talk and act. If we are not thinking clearly, or if we have faulty thinking, or if we simply do not think at all, that will show itself in sins in our lives.

Having a sound mind has been compared to the brakes on a car. The brakes are essential for slowing the car down and bringing it to a stop. If, for example, your car is going down a steep hill or there is some danger ahead, it is essential that your brakes are working properly so that you do not get hurt. So also is it essential for our Christian life that we have the brakes of a sound mind. A sound mind stomps on the brakes and keeps us from rushing into spiritual danger. Having a sound mind, we put the brakes on saying sinful words, on indulging in sexual sin, on copping a disrespectful and rebellious attitude.

Part of the difficulty in having a sound mind is that we have slew of enemies that are intent on driving us to spiritual drunkenness. The lies of the devil and world, the lies that our sinful flesh loves, are intended to distort reality. They distort reality by saying that what is sinful and ugly is actually good and enjoyable, and by saying that what is good and holy is actually miserable and worthless. They want us to think that black is white, and white is black.

Putting it that way might make you think that these lies can be written off as easy to spot, but what makes them so effective is that sin blinds. Sin is so deceitful that we think we see clearly when in reality we are blind. We are the blind man who is convinced that he has 20/20 vision. Talk about drunkenness!

One of the ways that our enemies try to rob us of a sound mind is with regard to our manhood. The world is trying to emasculate us men. They do so by portraying manly strength as a vice rather than a virtue. They do so by saying that men and women are not different but fundamentally the same.

The world also corrupts our view of manhood by encouraging us to prolong childhood and delay growing up. In their view a man is someone who is only concerned about having a good time. He spends his

twenties partying, spending money carelessly, having fun with his buddies, and dating several women but never getting serious with any of them. Maybe when he is in his thirties will he settle down and start thinking about marriage and a family. Soon, if the child of God is not careful, he starts to adopt the thinking of the world about manhood.

Another way in which our enemies try to rob us of a sound mind has to do with the way we speak. It seems as if everywhere a young man turns he is bombarded with dirty, blasphemous language. He hears it at work; he hears it in the music of the world; he hears it on TV; he hears it on YouTube. Soon, if he is not careful, what has been coming into his ears affects his mind and comes out of his mouth.

Another way in which our enemies try to rob us of a sound mind is with pornography. Obviously there are websites, YouTube channels, and Instagram accounts devoted to the most blatant and vile forms of this sin. But then there are the supposedly “soft” versions of pornography: the scantily clad women posing on billboards, on the magazines at the grocery store checkout, on Netflix, and on almost every webpage you visit. The strange woman of Proverbs is everywhere-present.

I hope to devote more attention to this in future articles, but for now I want briefly to mention the effect that viewing such things has on the mind of a young man. One of the ways that this robs him of a sound mind is by desensitizing him. Because he sees these images so often, things that used to bother him do not any longer. It also affects the way that he views women in general. He views them as sex objects, meant only for his sexual gratification. He may also think it normal to demand of women that they do the things which he has seen the women on the Internet do. It also affects the way in which a young man thinks about beauty. His view of beauty is warped by the airbrushed, photo-shopped model. His view of beauty is that it is only skin-deep.

Drinking from this tap of lies is intoxicating and addicting. Which is why the godly man refuses to drink from it. He guards his mind and heart, as well as his eyes and ears and hands, so that he is sober.

Are *you* sober?

## Wise

Not only must the Christian young men be sober, but he must also be wise.

This is the emphasis of the book of Proverbs. Proverbs was written by a father to his son to impart wisdom to him. Certainly it is true that what is said in the book is for all God’s people; but it has special application to young men. Especially young men must hear the com-

mand: “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Prov. 4:7).

Wisdom is knowing what is true and right in every situation and then living in harmony with that reality.

Wisdom is closely related to understanding. Understanding is the spiritual ability to take the knowledge we have gained and to discern the truth that lies at the heart of it. It is the ability to penetrate through all outward appearances to perceive things as they truly are. Understanding is especially the ability to discern how everything that we have come to know is connected to God. All things stand in the service of God their Creator; He is the truth and reality of all things. Understanding is the ability to see the connection of all things to God and His glory.

Understanding is related to wisdom, but the two are not identical. The wisdom that we are called to get is understanding put into action. A wise person is one who has the ability to apply his understanding, the ability to live in accordance with the reality of understanding. Very simply, wisdom refers to acting godly. It is the application of our knowledge and understanding to every circumstance of life so that we direct all things to the highest end: the glory of God.

A wise man glorifies God in all he does. He seeks to glorify God in single life and in marriage. He seeks to glorify God in the rearing of the children God gives him. He seeks to glorify God in school and at work. He seeks to glorify God in his friendships and in his relationships to others in the church.

To give just one specific application, a wise man glorifies God with his mouth. A foolish man opens his mouth when he should keep it shut, but a wise man knows when to be quiet. A foolish man keeps his mouth shut when he should speak, but a wise man speaks when he must. A foolish man says the wrong thing at the wrong time, but a wise man says the right thing at the right time.

Are *you* wise?

## Compassionate

A third attribute of a man of character is that he is compassionate. For “compassionate” you could substitute any number of synonyms: caring, considerate, kind, loving, merciful, sympathetic, tenderhearted, thoughtful, and so on. A man who is compassionate is one who has pity on others in their misery and seeks, as he is able, to alleviate that misery.

At first the idea of being compassionate might not seem very manly. It might seem more like a feminine virtue. It certainly flies in the face of what the world

thinks about a man. Some think that a man must be an inconsiderate, self-centered brute. They say that compassion is weakness.

But when we look more carefully at what the Bible says of manhood, it is clear that a man of character is a man of compassion. Previously, we spoke of how men are to be leaders, and how leadership involves selfless service to others. Husbands are called to love their wives and dwell with them as men of understanding. Our Lord Jesus, the model of biblical manhood, is frequently described as a merciful and sympathetic Savior.

Do not mistake this compassionate attitude for weakness. It does not mean that we become a doormat for others to walk all over. It does not mean we never open our mouth and stand up for a just cause. So much does the compassionate man care for others, that he is ready to open his mouth to defend a just cause and ready to stand up for the helpless. Compassion is strength.

Are *you* compassionate?

## Conclusion

If we would oversimplify things and boil the characteristics of a mature Christian man down to two things, I would argue that they are the following two: strength (see the last article in this series) and character.

It is these two qualities that enable the Christian man to carry out his chief responsibility from God to be a leader. It is with strength and character that he is able to serve and protect, to provide and make decisions, to instruct and be an example. Without the strength of conviction, he is crippled, weak, and unable to lead. And without character, he bumbles everything and makes a mess of it all. He might have all kinds of strength and energy, but his zeal is misguided and destructive.

Our marriages need husbands who are men of strength and character. They need to have strength to lead with conviction, but they also need to harness and direct that strength with good character so that they do not damage their wives.

Our families need fathers who are men of strength and character. We need fathers who take seriously their responsibility to lead the home, and then do so with great care and wisdom. Without wisdom, the home is a mess. But “through wisdom is an house builded” (Prov. 24:3).

Our churches need men who are men of strength and character. Certainly we need wise men to serve in the special offices in the church as pastors, elders, and deacons. But we also need wise men to hold the office of believer. What hurt we can do to the church through our foolishness, but how useful we can be when characterized by wisdom.

God, give us men of character!