

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Growing Up: Becoming a Real Man

Scripture: Ephesians 4:13–14; Hebrews 5:12–14

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Biblical manliness is about authentic character. It's not about bravado, and it's not about boyishness. Going out into the woods with a bunch of other men, putting on war paint, making animal noises, telling scary stories around a campfire, and then working up a good cry might be good, visceral fun and all, but that has nothing to do with the biblical idea of manliness.

Real manliness (“mature manhood”—Ephesians 4:13) is defined by Christlike character. Not just the Gentle-Jesus-meek-and-mild-style character, but the full-orbed fruit of the Spirit rounded out with strength, courage, conviction, and a stout-hearted willingness to oppose error and fight for the truth—even to the point of laying down your life for the truth if necessary.

When the apostle Paul writes about the characteristics of true Christian manhood in Ephesians 4, he focuses on one vital mark of spiritual maturity: “That we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Ephesians 4:14). You want to be a man as opposed to a little boy? Grow up in your grasp of the truth. Get a grip on sound doctrine and quit being influenced by every new trend and every undulating breeze that blows across the evangelical landscape. Quit chasing the evangelical fads. Get anchored in the truth, and learn to defend it.

That's the main mark of true manhood Paul singles out: doctrinal stability—and along with that are some clear implications: you need to be certain of what you believe. You need to understand it. You need to be able to defend it against everything—ranging from the changing winds of whatever happens to be in style at the moment all the way to human trickery and the cunning craftiness of Satan himself. Because the enemy will offer all kinds of counterfeit doctrines that look good and sound OK—false doctrines where the error is so carefully nuanced it's hard to put your finger on what's wrong with it. He will tempt you to set aside what is precise and carefully defined in place of dumbed-down doctrinal formulas that don't necessarily sound dangerous—but are.

Compare the apostle's vision of manly maturity with John Eldredge's famous “sine qua non of manhood.” Eldredge says, “Deep in his heart, every man longs for a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.”

That is a little boy's lie. That's the stuff of children's fantasies. You simply won't find a description of manliness like that in Scripture. Instead, Scripture says what motivates real men is a love for the truth; a contempt for error; and a passion for being used by God in the work of snatching people from the grip of the father of lies.

I keep hearing about churches who (in order to appeal to ostensibly “masculine” instincts) have moved their men's fellowship to the pub, where they discuss theology as a hobby and share their views on life as Christian men over beer and cigars.

Let me point out that there's nothing particularly manly about that. It's still a private hen party, but you've just substituted beer and cigars in place of tea and crumpets.

If you want a taste of what real manhood looks like, do some gospel ministry in a hostile environment. Stand up for the truth in some venue where it is under attack. Get a solid, manly grasp on the Bible and stand up and teach its hard truths in a way that helps make the truth clear to people who are struggling to get it. Contend earnestly for the faith when some nice-sounding heretic wants you to sit down and have a friendly dialogue about it. Be the kind of man Paul describes here: someone who is steadfast and sure, with a solid grasp of classic biblical truths that have gone out of vogue. Stand against popular opinion when you know you should, and do it every time the opportunity arises.

That's the real gauge of "mature manhood" as Paul describes it in Ephesians 4:13-14. A grown-up man is firm and steadfast in the truth. That means he is disciplined, knowledgeable; anchored; he understands the truth well and is devoted to it. He has his senses trained for discernment.

Oh, and by the way: that doesn't happen to lazy people. You have to be diligent to get to that point. Read Hebrews 5:12-14 for the classic prescription of how to move out of adolescence into that kind of mature manliness. Read the first verse in Psalm 1 if you want to see an example of it.

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