

Manly Men

by J.R. Miller

A Christian man must cultivate both active and passive virtues, combining strength of conviction, boldness, enthusiasm, and moral heroism with gentleness, patience, and compassion.

Scripture: Joshua 1:9, Proverbs 10:9, 1 Corinthians 16:13, Ephesians 6:10

Topics: "Integrity", "Christian Manhood"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that true Christian manhood encompasses more than just gentleness and kindness; it requires strength, courage, and integrity. He critiques men who, despite possessing passive virtues, lack the active qualities that inspire and lead, rendering them ineffective in combating evil. Miller highlights the importance of truthfulness and conscientiousness, arguing that even minor faults can tarnish a man's character and diminish his influence. He presents Jesus as the ultimate model of manliness, combining tenderness with unwavering strength and moral fortitude. Ultimately, a true man of God must embody both gentleness and the courage to act decisively for righteousness.

Transcript

The Christian life is more than a tender sentiment. Christian character is more than gentleness, patience, meekness, humility, kindness. There are some men who have these qualities--who lack the more robust characteristics of manhood. They are weak, nerveless, spineless. They are lacking in courage, force, energy and that indefinable quality called grit. Their gentleness, is the gentleness of weakness. They are not manly men. Their virtues are of the passive kind, and they lack those active, positive traits that give men power, and make them strong to stand, and resistless when they move. Such people have no strength of conviction. Holding their opinions lightly, their grasp of them is easily relaxed.

They are remarkable for their forbearance and meekness, thus illustrating one phase of true Christly character--but they serve only as moral buffers in society, to deaden the force of the concussion produced by other men's passions. They generate no motion, they kindle no enthusiasm, they inspire no courage, they make no aggression against the world's hosts of evil. They are good men. They have the patience of Job, the meekness of Moses, the amiability of John--but they lack the boldness of Peter, the enthusiasm of Paul and the moral heroism of Luther, superadded to their passive virtues--to make them truly strong men.

There is another class of defects sometimes found in men of very gentle spirit. They possess many of those qualities of disposition that are most highly commended in the Scriptures. They are not easily

provoked. They speak the soft answer that turns away wrath. They endure well, the rough experiences of life. They are gentle to all men, and full of kindness, and yet they are lacking in the quality of perfect truthfulness. They are neither false nor dishonest in great matters--but in countless minor matters, they are characterized by a disregard of that exact truthfulness which the religion of Christ requires. They are not careful to keep their engagements. They are ready to promise any favor asked of them--they have not the courage to say "No!" to a request--but they frequently fail to fulfill what they so readily promise. They are unpunctual men, late at meetings, keeping others waiting at appointments, and often failing altogether to appear after the most positive engagement to attend. We can readily forgive the cruelty of that facetious editor, who recently wrote a tearful "In Memoriam" of one of these unpunctual men, speaking of him as the "late Mr. Blank."

These late people are frequently careless, too, about paying little debts. In charity, I think, "careless" is the proper word, for they do not intend to defraud anyone--but have permitted themselves to grow into a loose habit of doing business. They make little purchases or borrow little sums of money from friends, faithfully promising to pay or return the amount in a day or two--but neglecting to do so, until by and by the matter fades altogether from their memory. They borrow books also--if they chance to be of a literary turn of mind; and other articles of various kinds, pledging themselves to return the same in a very little time; and many an empty place in a library and many a missing article in a household proclaim either a great many bad memories--or a painful lack of conscientiousness in borrowers.

There is still another class of blemishes for which I can find no more gentle designation than the word meannesses. No other faults detract more from the nobleness of manhood, and yet it must be confessed with shame, that none are more common. A man seems to possess an excellent character--as beheld from a little distance. He has many elements of power, traits of usefulness, perhaps even of greatness; but when drawn close to him into intimate personal relations, you discover evidences of baseness which you had not suspected before.

As a friend, he is insincere. Through all the guise of good profession, the marks of selfishness and self-seeking appear. He uses his friends to further his own personal interests, and cares not that they suffer loss, provided that he himself is benefitted. He is not loyal to those to whom he professes such unfaltering devotion--but speaks freely in whispers to others, of their faults, disclosing many a matter entrusted to him or learned by him in the sacredness of close friendship. If he wishes anything accomplished that involves risk of his reputation, he puts some other person forward to do the unpleasant work, to bear the odium or take the sneers and reproach, while he quietly steps in to reap the advantage.

In business he is tightfisted and hard. He never pays a debt cheerfully, without protest or question. He treats every creditor as if he were an enemy or a conspirator, and as if his bills were fraudulent or unjust. He takes every advantage in a bargain. He haggles for the lowest penny when he is to pay, and the highest when he is making the sale. He counts the fractions of cents in his own favor. To his employees he pays the minimum of wages, while he extorts from them the maximum of work. He is suspicious of the honesty of everyone, quoting often the old aphorism of baseness, "Until you know that a man is honest--treat him as a rogue."

His baseness creeps out, too, in many very small things. He accepts compliments, dinners and other favors and kindnesses--but never returns them. He borrows his neighbor's newspaper to save the expense of buying one for himself. But to no one is he so mean--as to the Lord and to his church. When the contribution-box is passed, he selects the smallest bit of money in his pocket to give. When

subscriptions are asked, he puts down the least amount that will be received, and then, if possible, will in the end evade payment altogether. He is a small-souled, grasping, narrow-spirited man. He lives only for SELF, and even his selfishness overreaches itself, for in the eyes of all mankind, nothing is more despicable than baseness, and nothing brings back poorer and more beggarly returns.

All of these are unmanly qualities. It does not meet the case to say that they are minor faults, that we ought not to be hyper-critical, that we should have that large charity which covers even multitudes of blemishes. When right and wrong are involved--there are no little things. A star seems a mere speck to our poor vision--but to God's eye it is a vast burning sun. The evils that we deem so minute, in Heaven's sight are infinite. There is only one pattern on which we must fashion our lives, and in that there is no fault. The Word of God in its divine requirements, makes no provision for blemishes, though they are the smallest.

Then a little thought will show anyone that even the most trivial of these things do not only mar the beauty of the character as seen by others--but also destroy the influence of the person in the community. A man who becomes known as unfaithful to his promises and appointments, or as careless in meeting his obligations, in paying his debts and in returning what he has borrowed--soon wins for himself a very unenviable reputation. Such a man has no power for good. He may preach the gospel or exhort in meetings or teach in the Sunday-school--but his words avail nothing, because his character is worm-eaten--and he has lost the confidence and respect of his neighbors! All his goodness and well-meaning go for nothing, while even in the smallest matters he is known to be untruthful and dishonest, to evade paying his debts, or even to be careless of his promises and pledges.

Who has not known the usefulness of many an otherwise excellent man, utterly destroyed by a negligent disregard of his obligations and engagements? Who has any true respect for such a base man? Baseness defeats its own object--and wins contempt. Even as a matter of worldly policy--it is fatal unwisdom. Nothing wins the esteem of others, like generosity. And in the matter of manly character, it is a most despicable blemish. The world will forget and forgive almost anything, sooner than baseness. One exhibition of such a spirit in a Christian, does incalculable harm to his influence, and habitual baseness, in a little while utterly wastes his power for usefulness. How long can a sneaking, evasive, gossipy person have true friends--or retain the respect of those who know him?

We may call these trivial blemishes, and it may seem hard that, while a man is good in the staple of his character, he should be made to suffer for such minor faults--mere negligence of habit, perhaps, or mere accidents of education--but the fact stares us in the face, and must be accepted as inexorable. Even the ethics of the world, condemns these things as unmanly, and the character that allows itself to be tarnished by them, must pay the penalty in diminished or utterly destroyed influence for good.

It is worth our while, to study closely the character of true manliness, as we have its type and pattern in the life of our Lord. We soon learn that while in him, love blossomed out in all that is rich and beautiful in human tenderness and gentleness, it did not leave him weak and strengthless. Never was any other man so full of compassion, so pitiful toward those who had wandered, so patient in bearing wrong, or so forgiving toward his enemies. But you seek in vain in all his life--for the faintest trace of moral feebleness. To him, sin in any form, was unutterably abhorrent. Truth shone in every lineament of his soul.

He was the embodiment of courage. All the active virtues, as well as the passive, were exhibited in him. He was not merely a patient sufferer; he set a-going in the world, the mightiest forces of divinity--forces whose resistless momentum has penetrated all the world's life, and which even at the distance of nineteen

centuries, have lost none of their energy or vitality. He was not a weak man, swept along by the strong currents of the world's passions to an unavoidable destiny. So he sometimes appears to superficial observation--but so he was not. Every step was voluntary. His was the sublime march of a king. He had all power and was always active, never passive even in what seem the most helpless hours of his life. He laid down his life; he had power to lay it down. Even in dying he was active, voluntarily, giving up his life.

We cannot study enough this sometimes neglected phase of Christ's life--the force and positiveness of his character. Patient to endure, there was yet power enough in his gentlest word--to make it a living influence for uncounted centuries. His most passive moments were marked by exhibitions of omnipotence. Submitting to the arresting band--he yet put forth his hand to work a miracle of healing. On his cross--he opened heaven's gates to a penitent soul.

Then he was in every way the manliest of men--large-hearted, noble-spirited, generous to the very uttermost of self-sacrifice. No microscopic eye can find in all his life a trace of selfishness or one token of baseness.

Such is the Pattern, and a Christian man must be strong as well as tender. The active virtues must be cultivated as well as the passive. Meekness must not be weakness. The soft speech must not be the timid utterance of moral feebleness. Like the mighty engine which can polish a needle--or cut a bar of iron, a Christian man must have a touch as gentle as an infant's--and yet possess the courage of a hero to smite evil and to do the Lord's work. With the charity that bears all things and endures all things--he must have the force of character which will make his influence a mighty positive power for good. Truth must be wrought into the very grain and fibre of his manhood. His word must be as pure as gold. His lightest promises must be as sacredly kept--as his most solemn engagements.

He must be a large-hearted, generous man; unselfish, noble-spirited, above all suspicion of baseness. He must be scrupulously exact in all his dealings, promptly returning what he has borrowed, paying his debts the very day they are due, never seeking to evade them, never forgetting them, nor postponing payment until the very latest time. He must not be a hard man, exacting, oppressive, domineering, despotic. In a word, he must combine unflinching integrity, unvarying promptness and punctuality, and conscientious truthfulness, with generosity and liberality.

Such a man will grow into a marvelous power in the community in which he lives. People will believe in his religion, because he lives it. No one will sneer when he exhorts others to be honest, upright and true, prompt and punctual, and faithful to utmost scrupulousness to their engagements. His life is one unflawed crystal. He is a manly man. Even the enemies of religion respect him. His simplest words are weighty. His whole influence is for truth and nobleness. His daily life is a sermon. God is honored--and the world is blessed by his living.

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