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Proverbs 3:1-24
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THE MARKS OF MANHOOD

"The man who is considering the glory of God who
sent him is a true man."

John 7:18

There is a story told of a young English boy who decided to join the army. When asked why he wanted to join the army he replied, "Well, sir, I understand that in the army they pay you a lot for doing a little. When you get on further, they pay you more for doing less; and when you retire, they pay you quite a lot for doing nothing!"

Unfortunately, there seem to be some people for whom this kind of life has a great attraction. A great many of them however end up loafers and bums who complain about the injustice of the world and how they were robbed and cheated by the so-called inequities of society.

Contrast that attitude with the one revealed in this story concerning a distinguished executive addressing a class of high school seniors. "Before I leave", he said, "I am anxious to know what your objectives in life are. You, in the front row," he said, pointing his finger. "What's yours?" A young man jumped to his feet and replied, "I'm not sure specifically, but I'm going to try to get somewhere." "How many others feel that way?" the executive asked. All agreed except one young girl. "What's your objective?" "Well," the girl said timidly, "I guess I'm more interested in helping someone than I am in just getting somewhere." "Young lady," replied the executive, "you can't live by that philosophy and not get somewhere."

Now I don't happen to be one of those who thinks the younger generation is going to the dogs. If they are, it is because they are part of a whole society headed in that direction, and young people have a lot better excuse for any peculiarities which they may manifest than have the rest of us. They have been brought into a mixed-up world not of their own making. A new father looked at all the babies in the hospital nursery and then asked a nurse, "Why are they all crying?" "Listen," she replied, if you were only a few days old, without any clothes, out of a job and owed the government nearly \$2,000 on the national debt, you'd be bawling too."

But every generation enters a crazy mixed-up world. It has always been so and perhaps it always will be. Our task is not to sit-out life, complaining about it, but to face it and try to make something worthwhile out of it. In order to do this, we must strive to become what, for want of a better word, we must describe as mature men--and we do not exclude women, for we use the term "man" in the generic sense.

II

What makes a human being a mature man? Perhaps we could first delineate some misconceptions concerning manhood. For the young we could assert that you are not a man merely because you are old enough to drive a car, or because the law says you can vote, or because you smoke cigarettes openly or surreptitiously, or because you have a job, or are married, or have joined the armed services. None of these things can make you a man.

What is manhood? Well, even the dictionary informs us that it is more than the arrival at a certain chronological age. It requires courage, bravery and resolution, according to that book. But religion requires one more thing. It requires courage, bravery, resolution, and it also requires what is outlined in our text out of the Gospel of John--and again, herein is the value of a modern translation revealed. The King James puts it this way, "He that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him." With a bit of pondering, you can figure out what that means. But here is how Phillips puts it, and it hits us right between the eyes. "The man who is considering the glory of the God who sent him is a true man. There can be no dishonesty about him."

What is necessary, therefore, for human beings to become mature men is something more than changes in one's physiology, something more than the passage of time. Some changes have to take place within the mind and spirit if a person is to take on the true marks of manhood. He has to recognize that he is a creature of God and dwells in God's world. Therefore, he has to live by God's rules.

III

First of all, he will then begin to realize that life has a serious purpose and is not a game. During the second world war, William Abrahams wrote a poem which has always stuck in my mind as containing a tragic truth that seems all too widespread in the human race.

"Tonight Shanghai is burning,
And we are dying too.
What bomb more surely mortal
Than death inside of you?
For some men die by shrapnel
And some go down in flames.
But most men perish inch by inch
In play at little games."

I have recently been reading the autobiography of H. L. Mencken, founder of The American Mercury, and a man whom had I known him in life, I might have thoroughly disliked. But he nevertheless fulfilled this basic requirement of manhood. His father died when he was 18. Two days later he applied for a job with the Baltimore Herald. He was told there was no job available, but that if he wanted to drop in from time to time, something might turn up. He went back to that newspaper office everyday for the next four weeks and was finally given a job--without pay. A few weeks later he was offered five dollars a week. Within ten years he was the managing editor.

Manhood, you see, is not thrust upon you. It must be striven for, but it is within the grasp of every normal human being.

Do you remember the story of the men digging a grave in a rural church-yard who were overtaken by darkness? They decided to finish the job in the morning. To prevent any passer-by from falling into the hole, they left one man on guard. Late in the evening he got a bit chilly, decided to crawl into the hole, sit down in a corner and try to keep warm. He promptly went to sleep. About midnight, a young man who was taking a short-cut through the cemetery from his girl friend's house, fell into the open grave. After several futile attempts to extricate himself, he muttered, "Oh Lord, I can't make it." Just then the sleeping grave digger awoke, reached over, touched the lad and said, "Oh, yes you can." And he did!

Developing into a mature human personality would be easy if all it involved was increasing in size, taking on some questionable adult habits or fulfilling certain requirements of the law. It is difficult precisely because it involves far more than that.

IV

Let me then briefly outline what I believe are at least three important marks of manhood. There are no doubt many others, but no person can be considered a mature person who lacks these distinguishing traits.

Number one, a mature person respects the past, but he is not bound by it.

Those who ignore the mistakes men have made in the past are doomed to repeat those mistakes. A mature person learns from the mistakes of others. He recognizes that the human race has had a lot of experience and he endeavors to study and understand it. He doesn't want to repeat the experience which millions of others have had when he already knows the tragic results of that experience.

Out of such experience has come the Ten Commandments and the moral principles which have served as the very foundation of western civilization. When millions have found these moral imperatives essential to a happy, well-ordered life, are you so wise and learned that you can deny their validity offhand and propose a better way?

We must respect the past, yet we cannot be bound by it. We cannot become victims of it. We must investigate and experiment in the moral and spiritual realm, as well as in the scientific. But we will not reject the tried and tested for a mere whim or fancy.

A second mark of maturity requires that a man make his own decisions and accept the responsibility for them. He must not ask others to make decisions which only he can make. Using his own experience and the experience of the past, he acts according to what he believes is right, and good and true. He seeks the help and guidance of God and of his friends, but he knows that the most difficult decisions of life must always be his own decisions, and when they have been made, if he is an honorable man, he will accept their consequences and the full responsibility for them. He will not whine that someone else was to blame, or that life used him badly. He will not complain that someone owes him a living or owes him success. Success can never be given to us, it must be achieved and earned.

Do you recall anywhere in the New Testament Jesus doing what is so commonly referred to today as, "passing the buck"? He made his decision to go to Jerusalem, knowing the cost involved. He accepted the consequences of that decision and he died. But nowhere can you find Jesus blaming those consequences on someone else. He was a man. He made his own decisions and he accepted the consequences of his own choices. No person can call himself a mature man who is unwilling to do that.

Thirdly, the mature person, the real man, has convictions and the courage to live by them. This principle is inherent in the words of John which serve as our text:

"The man who is considering the glory of God who sent him
is a true man."

The true man is one who loves and respects the God who gave him life. The true man honors God, knows that God has a will for him. He seeks to know and do that will. This is the primary mark of manhood--to recognize that we are servants of God.

Somewhere some people got the idea that a man was one who always relied entirely upon himself and didn't need any help from anybody. That is far from the truth. A real man is one who knows that he is a creature of God, that he has limitations, and must always rely upon God rather than upon his own puny self. A real man is one who prays. Only a fool thinks he can go it alone.

V

Let me conclude by reading a portion of a biography written by an unknown author--the biography of a Dumb Bell:

"He knew he was dumb before he knew anything else. When he started in school his playmates told him. When he began to earn his living his fellow employees told him.

"He found it so hard to master the alphabet that he learned it forward and backward. It was so hard for him to learn things that he knew he could never afford to forget them, because he would not have time to go back over his tracks.

"When he wrote a letter it was such an effort that he had to make every word count. He had no time to say a thing twice. When he made a compilation it had to be right the first time, because he could not go over his work again. When he was sent for information, he had to get it all and get it correct because it took him so long to complete his errand. When he was asked a question he had to answer it with what he knew because he was not clever enough to bluff. He was still at his work on most nights when the other men in his department had reached home.

"He was so dumb that he never ceased to be grateful when his firm gave him an advance. He was so dumb that he could not figure out why so many men brighter than he gradually came under his direction. Even when he was entitled to be called the Boss, his own office boy referred to him as the "Big Dumb-Bell".

"He never understood why, when his firm got into financial trouble, banks insisted that he be made receiver. When he worked the business back to solvency he could not explain why the stockholders made him president. He never asked, because it made no difference.

"He was so hopelessly and eternally dumb that he was always looking for a better man to take over his responsibilities. And when he died his kind face still wore a puzzled look, as though in death he was trying to figure out why every business in his home town closed for the funeral, and why the church he helped to build was not large enough to admit a tenth of the friends who wanted to pay their last respects."

Paul put it differently. "We are fools (in the eyes of the world) for Christ's sake."

"The man who is considering the glory of God who sent him is a true man." Are you what you are, and do you do what you do, because you want to glorify God? In this does true manhood consist!