

How God Defines A Man

As Paul came to the end of 1 Corinthians, among the final instructions he gave to that troubled church was this advice: “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, *act like men*, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13; emphasis mine). The expression “act like men” catches our attention. Obviously, Paul was saying that, given the problems the church in Corinth was experiencing, its members needed to display traits which have traditionally been linked to manliness.¹ We may do the same today, urging our sons to be courageous or strong by saying, “Be a man!” or “Take it like a man!”

People have always had differences of opinion about what makes “a real man.” Our ideas are often caught from others, as a result of our environment, and are really not reasonable. For instance, when I went to high school, a real man had to be active in sports, especially in football. I played football. On the other hand, a real man would not play in the band—at least that was my idea (an idea that I have since outgrown). Others, of course, have differing views.

While it may be interesting to talk about what men consider to be manly, what we really need to learn is how God defines a man. Until we know that, we cannot “act like men.”

¹“Act like men” is a good literal translation of the Greek. Some versions—for example, the KJV and Phillips—have something similar, whereas others use one of the traits which the translators think Paul intended by his admonition: “be courageous” (Revised Standard Version); “be valiant” (New English Bible).

WHAT GOD’S MAN IS NOT

We can begin with some negatives. We know what a man is *not*, if we accept God’s definition of a man.

God’s man is not a man who abuses his wife and children. If we accept God’s Word as our authority, a man will love his wife as he loves himself (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 31). He will nourish and cherish her as he does his own body (Ephesians 5:29). He will honor her and care for her (1 Peter 3:7). He will also love his children, dealing with them tenderly (see 1 Thessalonians 2:11). This picture has no room for physical, psychological, or sexual abuse of wife or children. Any man who commits such acts—whatever else may be said of him—is not God’s man.

God’s man is not violent. The Bible recommends the way of love for all, both men and women. A loving man is, by definition, not a violent man. He does not take pride in hurting others or in demonstrating his fighting ability. He has no need to prove his manhood; he is not afraid to refuse to fight. Pride—an attitude condemned by the Scriptures—is what causes one to say, “No one can talk to me that way”; “I will not take that from anyone”; “I will not walk away from a fight.” That may be the way “heroes” talk in the movies, but that is not the way God’s man talks.

God’s man does not define himself in terms of his sexual conquests. Not long ago, people in the U.S. were shocked to learn about a club composed of otherwise outstanding high school boys. The

members of the club were competing to have sex with the most girls. Apparently, they thought their sexual exploits made them men. Popular movies promote much the same idea; the male hero is often attractive, muscular, and violent—a real “ladies’ man” who, in the course of the movie, is likely to make love to several women.

In contrast to this popular view, the Bible teaches plainly that fornication and adultery are wrong. In Proverbs the young man is constantly warned against sexual promiscuity. From God’s point of view, a man should keep himself pure and be faithful to one wife throughout his lifetime.

God’s man is not a pleasure-seeker. He does not live for momentary pleasures. The popular media exalt such a lifestyle. I remember an old country song which included the refrain “I’m gonna live fast, love hard, die young, and leave a beautiful memory.” That well expresses the ideal of those who say, with the beer commercials, “Get all the gusto you can—you only go around once.” Television commercials seem always to picture young people partying. They make me wonder: Do these people ever work? Do they ever sleep? Surely, they have some responsibilities! How can they afford the time and money to spend their lives just having fun?

The Bible warns against enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season. It teaches us to consider the consequences of what we do. Furthermore, “living for pleasure” involves a life of irresponsibility. This is the opposite of living as a cross-carrying Christian. God’s man cannot live as a pleasure-seeker.

God’s man is not necessarily “the strong silent type.” Western society seems to have the idea that a real man is hard, unbending, unfeeling, and unemotional. (If he does have feelings, he never lets them show.) John Wayne is likely to be a role model; in his movies he was big and tough and strong. He never cried! When something bad happened, he would take it in stride, swallow hard, jut out his chin, and keep on going.

We ought to understand that the “strong, silent type” is a worldly ideal, not a biblical one. Jesus was the greatest man who ever lived (as well as being Deity), but He was also tender,

loving, kind, and gentle. He welcomed children! He cried! He was not the strong, silent type. Neither do we have to be that type to be God’s men today.²

WHAT GOD’S MAN IS

What, then, is a man as defined by God? Gene Getz suggested that the mature man of God is the man who has acquired the characteristics of elders found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.³ Thus he would say that those qualifications make a man what he ought to be in God’s sight. While his view has merit, I believe that the Bible provides an even better way to discover what a man should be.

When Jesus was born, God became man! He was “Immanuel,” “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). The Bible teaches that Jesus, the Son of God, was truly man. He was “the Word,” and “the Word became flesh” (John 1:1, 14). He was “born of a woman” (Galatians 4:4). Although “He existed in the form of God,” He “emptied Himself”; He was “made in the likeness of men” and was “found in appearance as a man” (Philippians 2:6–8). He became “flesh and blood” and was “made like His brethren in all things” (Hebrews 2:14, 17). Paul said, “There is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). During His ministry “Son of man” was the designation Jesus preferred for Himself. John wrote that the deceiver and the antichrist is the one who denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (2 John 7).

Since God became man in Jesus, should we not assume that He was, from God’s viewpoint, the ideal man? He must have been man as God meant for man to be. Therefore, by looking at Jesus, we can see the characteristics of God’s man. Consider a few of those characteristics.

Jesus illustrates that *a man, as God defines him, is one who accepts responsibility.* Jesus came to do the will of His Father, and that included going to the cross. Now Jesus calls on men to follow His example: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his

²In fact, seeking to live up to that ideal probably does harm to men. It causes them to keep their emotions hidden, thus contributing to various physical problems.

³Gene Getz, *The Measure of a Man* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1974).

cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24).

Perhaps no greater need exists in our world than for men to accept their responsibilities. A man has the responsibility, for instance, of providing for his own. Men who father children and then leave them without support are irresponsible; they shame their sex and show contempt for their Maker. A man also has the responsibility to be a leader, at least in his own home and in the church. Too often, women have had to take over leadership because men refused to accept it. A man also has responsibility for his own actions. Paul wrote that "each one shall bear his own load" (Galatians 6:5). For too long, we have been inclined to try to blame our mistakes and sins on others. God's man refuses to do so; when he sins, he confesses his sin—without blaming anyone else—and resolves not to do it again.

Jesus also illustrates that *a man, as God defines him, is courageous, especially in the face of danger*. When the mob came to arrest Jesus, He volunteered the information that He was the one they were looking for—apparently showing no fear. When they heard him, "they drew back, and fell to the ground" (John 18:6). He was one; they were many. They had weapons; He had none. They meant Him harm; He intended them no hurt. Still, they were the ones afraid; He was not!

We can add to Jesus' example many other men of God who courageously stood against enemies, never flinching in the face of threats. Think of Daniel; his three young Hebrew friends who were thrown into a fiery furnace; the prophets; the apostles; the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11; and the martyred saints mentioned in Revelation. All of them had courage; all received God's approval. They were God's men, because they were courageous in their service to Him.

A man must have courage to stand against the crowd and do what is right when all others are doing wrong. He should have the courage to be kind and loving, to show Christian compassion, in a society where such attributes are thought to signal weakness.

Furthermore, Jesus illustrates that *a man, as God defines him, is faithful; he is a man of integrity*. Jesus was faithful to the purpose for which He came to earth. He came to do the will of the

Father, and He did what He came to do. Early in life He set out on the road that led to His death, and He followed that road faithfully until He was nailed to the cross. He no doubt had a thousand opportunities to deviate from His purpose, but He never did.

Even so, God's man today keeps his word. He demonstrates integrity in his home: He is faithful to his wife, and he keeps his promises to his children. He is a person of integrity at work. He gives his employer a full day's work for a day's pay. If he is an employer, he treats his employees fairly. He also keeps his word to God. When we become Christians we commit ourselves to God, giving Him all that we are and have. Some people soon forget that commitment. They renege on their promise to God. God's man will not do that. Realizing that he owes his very life to the Lord, he faithfully follows Him throughout his years.

Finally, *as God defines him, a man should be loving*. He thinks not just of himself, but also of others; and he does what is best for them. That, of course, was the chief characteristic of Jesus. He came not to be served, but to serve. In His death, He showed the greatest love known to man. Thinking not of Himself—of His own good or pleasure or profit—He went of His own free will to the cross, to die for others. He died for us because of His love for us.

If we would be men by God's definition, we also must be loving. We must think not just of ourselves, but of others as well. A life of love for the benefit of others: That is the kind of life God's man leads. Obviously, that is not the kind of life a man of the world sees as his ideal. He aims for self-gratification, self-fulfillment, and self-aggrandizement. God's man emphasizes self-denial, and self-giving—yet in losing himself, God's man will "find himself." He will find fulfillment, peace, and power—in this life a "hundredfold" and in the life to come "eternal life." What more could one ask?

CONCLUSION

When we see Jesus hanging on a cross, His arms outstretched, His hands nailed in place, His head bloody with the pricks of thorns, and we hear Him cry out, "It is finished!" then we must say, "This was a man!" May each of us determine to become such a man! ◆