

THOUGHTS FOR YOUNG MEN

“Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.”

– Titus 2:6

WHEN St. Paul wrote his Epistle to Titus about his duty as a minister, he mentioned young men as a class requiring peculiar attention. After speaking of aged men and aged women, and young women, he adds this pithy advice—“Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded” (Tit 2:6). I am going to follow the Apostle’s advice. I propose to offer a few words of friendly exhortation to young men.

I am growing old myself, but there are few things I remember so well as the days of my youth. I have a most distinct recollection of the joys and the sorrows, the hopes and the fears, the temptations and the difficulties, the mistaken judgments and the misplaced affections, the errors and the aspirations, which surround and accompany a young man’s life. If I can only say something to keep some young man in the right way, and preserve him from faults and sins, which may mar his prospects both for time and eternity, I shall be very thankful.

There are four things which I propose to do:

- I. I will mention some *general reasons* why young men need exhorting.
- II. I will notice some special *dangers* against which young men need to be warned.
- III. I will give some general *counsels*, which I entreat young men to receive.
- IV. I will set down some special *rules of conduct*, which I strongly advise young men to follow.

On each of these four points, I have something to say, and I pray God that what I say may do good to some soul.

I. Reasons for Exhorting Young Men

In the first place, what are the general reasons why young men need peculiar exhortation? I will mention several of them in order.

1. For one thing, there is the painful fact that there are few young men anywhere who seem to have any religion.

I speak without respect of persons; I say it of all. High or low, rich or poor, gentle or simple, learned or unlearned, in town or in country—it makes no matter. I tremble to observe how few young men are led by the Spirit,

how few are in that narrow way which leads to life, how few are setting their affections upon things above, how few are taking up the cross and following Christ. I say it with all sorrow, but I believe, as in God's sight, I am saying nothing more than the truth.

Young men, you form a large and most important class in the population of this country; but where, and in what condition, are your immortal souls? Alas, whatever way we turn for an answer, the report will be one and the same!

Let us ask any *faithful minister* of the Gospel and mark what he will tell us. How many unmarried young people can he reckon up who come to the Lord's Supper? Who are the most backward about means of grace—the most irregular about Sunday services—the most difficult to draw to weekly lectures and prayer meetings—the most inattentive under preaching at all times? Which part of his congregation fills him with most anxiety? Who are the Reubens for whom he has the deepest “searchings of heart”? Who in his flock are the hardest to manage, who require the most frequent warnings and rebukes, who occasion him the greatest uneasiness and sorrow, who keep him most constantly in fear for their souls, and seem most hopeless? Depend on it, his answer will always be, “*The Young Men.*”

Let us ask the *parents* in any parish throughout England and see what they will generally say. Who in their families give them most pain and trouble? Who need the most watchfulness, and most often vex and disappoint them? Who are the first to be led away from what is right, and the last to remember cautions and good advice? Who are the most difficult to keep in order and bounds? Who most frequently break out into open sin, disgrace the name they bear, make their friends unhappy, embitter the old age of their relations, and bring down grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? Depend on it, the answer will generally be, “*The Young Men.*”

Let us ask the *magistrates* and officers of justice, and mark what they will reply. Who go to public-houses and beer-shops most? Who are the greatest Sabbath-breakers? Who make up riotous mobs and seditious meetings? Who are oftenest taken up for drunkenness, breaches of the peace, fighting, poaching, stealing, assaults, and the like? Who fill the gaols,¹ and penitentiaries, and convict-ships? Who are the class which requires the most incessant watching and looking after? Depend on it, they will at once point to the same quarter—they will say, “*The Young Men.*”

Let us turn to the *upper classes*, and mark the report we shall get from them. In one family, the sons are always wasting time, health, and money, in the selfish pursuit of pleasure. In another, the sons will follow no profession, and fritter away the most precious years of their life in doing nothing. In another, they take up a profession as a mere form, but pay no attention to its duties. In another, they are always forming wrong connections, gambling, getting into debt, associating with bad companions, keeping their friends in a constant fever of anxiety. Alas, rank, title, wealth, and education do not pre-

¹ **gaol** – local jail house.

vent these things! Anxious fathers, heart-broken mothers, and sorrowing sisters could tell sad tales about them, if the truth were known. Many a family, with everything this world can give, numbers among its connections some name that is never named, or only named with regret and shame—some son, some brother, some cousin, some nephew—who will have his own way, and is a grief to all who know him.

There is seldom a rich family, which has not got some thorn in its side, some blot in its page of happiness, some constant source of pain and anxiety. Often, far too often, is not this the true cause, “*The Young Men*”?

What shall we say to these things? These are facts: plain staring facts, facts which meet us on every side, facts which cannot be denied. How dreadful this is! How dreadful the thought, that every time I meet a young man, I meet one who is in all probability an enemy of God, traveling in the broad way, which leads to destruction, unfit for heaven! Surely, with such facts before me, you must allow there is a cause; you will not wonder that *I exhort you!*

2. For another thing, death and judgment are before young men, even as others, and they nearly all seem to forget it.

Young men, it is appointed unto you once to die; and however strong and healthy you may be now, the day of your death is perhaps very near. I see young people sick as well as old. I bury youthful corpses as well as aged. I read the names of persons no older than yourselves in every churchyard. I learn from books that, excepting infancy and old age, more die between thirteen and twenty-three than at any other season of life. And yet you live as if you were sure at present not to die at all!

Are you thinking you will mind these things *tomorrow*? Remember the words of Solomon: “Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Pro 27:1). “Serious things tomorrow,” said a heathen (Archias, the Theban²), to one who warned him of coming danger; but his tomorrow never came. Tomorrow is the devil’s day, but today is God’s. Satan cares not how spiritual your intentions may be, and how holy your resolutions, if only they are fixed for *tomorrow*. Oh, give not place to the devil in this matter! Answer him, “No, Satan! It shall be today, today.” All men do not live to be patriarchs, like Isaac and Jacob. Many children die before their fathers. David had to mourn the death of his two finest sons; Job lost all his ten children in one day. Your lot may be like one of theirs, and when death summons, it will be vain to talk of tomorrow—you must go at once.

Are you thinking you will have a *convenient season* to mind these things by and by? So thought Felix and the Athenians to whom Paul preached (Act 24:10-22; 17:22); but it never came. Hell is paved with such fancies. Better

² **Archias** – the Greek biographer Plutarch relates this story of Archias, a general of the ancient Greek city of Thebes, who put off reading a letter that would have alerted him of Pelopidas’ plan to kill him the next day.