

## Young Men

Over 2000 years ago the apostle John, wrote in 1 John 2:14, "... I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." What comes to your mind as you read this expression? When you read about "young men" what mental picture emerges? Sadly, young men are often given to wickedness. They revel in sowing "wild oats." They indulge in what the apostle Paul called "youthful lusts." This includes sexual impurity, drunkenness and such things. Some young men run in gangs and are given to violence. Many young men are defiant and rebellious toward authority. Often, in the inexperience of youth, young men do not consider the ultimate consequences of their behavior. They would do well to heed the following words from Ecclesiastes 11:9, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

It is very sad when a young man wastes the strength and energy of youth in dissipation and other sins. There are some memorable pictures in the book of Proverbs about the bitter regrets of those who have sinned against God in their youth. Those who give themselves to indulging in sexual impurity will eventually find themselves in the condition described in Proverbs 5:11, 12, "And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof..." Another picture from Proverbs speaks of how blind a young man is to the consequences of his sin when he pursues an immoral woman. It says, "He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life." (Proverbs 7:22, 23). Those who are given to drink or drugs would do well to ponder Proverbs 23:31, 32, "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."

## Well-Spent Youth

There is a much brighter picture, however, in this passage from 1 John. He writes to the young men in a very encouraging way. What **should** we think of when we think of the period of life when a man is young? Youth is not a time to be dreaded. It is a time to be enjoyed and to be used well. Youth is a time of strength and **energy**. Do you older men remember the time when you could stay up practically all the night and be ready for vigorous action the next day? As you are well aware, this period of intense strength and energy does not usually last very long in a man's life cycle.

Young manhood is not only a time of strength, stamina, energy, and endurance; it is also a time of promise, confidence, vision, and idealism. Young men often have a bright, optimistic outlook on life. The world, with all its troubles, seems bright to them. If there is a job to be done, many young men, instead of looking at the difficulties, enthusiastically believe there is a solution to the problem. This is very refreshing and encouraging. The present writer is at the time of this writing 64 years old. There are

times when I see a problem and worry about it. I sometimes express this worry to one of my sons. He will almost invariably encourage me and say something like, “Dad, that will work out alright. It’s not that big a deal.” Just the saying of this usually gives me a completely different outlook on the problem at hand. It is a sad fact that many older men, who have endured this old ungodly world for many years, tend to become pessimistic or cynical. It is good to get the perspective of a young man at times like this.

## Strength

John says that he had written to the young men because “ye are strong.” Now, young men certainly revel in their strength. They like vigorous sports and like to lift weights and do other things to enhance their strength. However, physical strength is not what the apostle is referring to here. He is talking about a strength the unbelieving world knows nothing of. He is speaking of **spiritual strength** that comes from maintaining a close walk with God. This is the strength to resist temptations. It is the strength to endure ridicule for the sake of Jesus Christ. It is the strength to suffer persecution and to maintain one’s convictions even when under intense pressure to compromise. Many men who are very strong physically are moral and spiritual cowards.

One of the strongest men in the history of the world from a spiritual standpoint was the Apostle Paul. Paul was beaten, shipwrecked, and imprisoned for the sake of Christ. He ultimately died the death of a martyr. He made a very enlightening statement about his great strength in 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10, “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

Paul taught the lessons he had learned about true strength to others. He wrote in Ephesians 6:10, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” Right before he sealed his testimony with his life, he wrote in 2 Timothy 2:1, “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

Concerning true strength, an old prophet taught the same thing centuries before Paul was born. He wrote in Jeremiah 9:23, 24, “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, **neither let the mighty man glory in his might**, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.”

## The Abiding Word

John also told the young men, “the word of God abideth in you.” The word translated “abide” is the

New Testament Greek word *meno*. It is translated variously, “abide, remain, dwell, continue, tarry, endure.” The tense of this verb is the present, active, indicative. This indicates continuous action in the present time. It is obvious that these young men were more than casual Bible readers. They undoubtedly read, studied, memorized, and meditated on the word of God. They put Biblical principles to practice in their daily lives.

This is the only way that a Christian can be strong. The source of consistent spiritual strength is in being under the constant influence of the word of God.

This was also true in the times of the Old Testament. David wrote much about this concept. He wrote in Psalm 119:11, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” In particular reference to young men, David wrote in Psalm 119:9, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.”

The Apostle Paul echoed this great truth in Colossians 3:16, as he admonished, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

## Overcomers

The Apostle John wrote that these young men had “overcome the wicked one.” That is an amazing and encouraging statement. We know that no one lives a life of sinless perfection. All that we do, even after regeneration, is mixed with sin. Yet, in a very significant way, these young men had lived the lives of overcomers. The world with all its evil had not overwhelmed them. They were living lives that reflected the grace of God in their lives. People who observed them knew that they were different from the run-of-the-mill young men. They were letting their lights shine, and their Lord was being thereby glorified. They were not living the sinful lifestyles of many other young men.

The word translated “overcome” is *vikao*. It means, “overcome, conquer, prevail, get the victory.” The verb tense is the perfect, active, indicative. This tense indicates a settled action. In other words, this overcoming behavior was a settled way of life for these young men. As we have already indicated, the way they were overcomers was in being habitually obedient to the word of God.

Another great Scripture which speaks of overcoming is Revelation 12:11, “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”

### A Prayer

As I concluded my speech to these fine young Christian men, I told them that I prayed they would be true to God, to themselves, and to others. I quoted these beautiful words, written by Howard Arnold Walter:

I would be true, for there are those that trust me; I would be pure, for there are those who care; I would be strong, for there is much to suffer; I would be brave, for there is much to dare, I would be brave, for there is much to dare.

I would be friend of all-the foe, the friendless; I would be giving and forget the gift; I would be humble, for I know my weakness; I would look up and laugh, and love, and lift, I would look up and laugh, and love, and lift.

I would be prayerful thru each busy moment; I would be constantly in touch with God; I would be tuned to hear the slightest whisper; I would have faith to keep the path Christ trod, I would have faith to keep the path Christ trod.