

The Liberated Man

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Years ago my father told me a World War I story that went something like this:

A young man was drafted into the army at the height of the war. When news reached his mother that her son had been inducted into the military, she became ecstatic with joy.

"The war's going to be over in two weeks!" she exclaimed.

"How do you know?" someone asked.

"Because my son has been drafted," she replied, "and he's never held a job longer than two weeks!"

Dad was a natural-born comedian and whenever he told this joke, it always got a laugh.

All joking aside, there is a serious thought here that leaves us with lingering thoughts and feelings.

Let me describe a young man to you. He is twenty-two years old, married, and the father of a small child. Last year he "held" three jobs. A month ago he quit his latest one after working only three weeks. His supervisor "got on his case," so he got mad and told his boss what he could do with the job.

The little family moved in with his parents. Our young man's eyes are glued to the TV screen several hours at a stretch. Instead of being with his wife and baby, he spends his evenings out playing ball with the guys.

Be careful not to tell him what to do or he will growl at you something about his being a man and big enough to do what he wants.

For the sake of a "handle," we will call him Chuck. Maybe you know him by another name.

Before we come down too hard on Chuck, we must remember what a young fellow has to face these days to become a real man.

For one thing, contemporary society does not give him much to go on. Juvenile attitudes toward human sexuality are palmed off as being "adult." Drinking and sex are assumed to be marks of manhood. He is encouraged to make his decisions by what *he* thinks and feels. Self-will is camouflaged as independence.

On the other hand, an imaginary uniformity of the sexes is confused with equality. Some try to confuse him by advising him to question even his own gender. Thus real masculinity becomes obscured, its qualities rarely defined, while homosexual feelings and practices are elevated to societal acceptability.

Perhaps, too, Chuck was raised by an immature father (or step-father) who struggled ceaselessly with his own self-image as a man and therefore who was not able to be a positive role model for him.

So we have a not uncommon product: a confused, frustrated little boy hiding inside a big body, trying to convince himself and the world that he is an adult.

Now this—the world's caricature—is not what God intended for any man.

Selfishness destroys relationships and produces alienation. Alienation leads to isolation. Christ came to emancipate us from selfishness, break us out of the prison of isolation, bring reconciliation and restore relationships—with God, with ourselves, with others.

Men's liberation is not escape from responsibility into a proud, make-believe ego world. That is Satan's emasculated substitute. Rather, it is God's transformational program for making new men and releasing their full potential!

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Here are some marks of the new man.

From Ephesians 4:22 - 24 we learn that the new man is "created according to God in righteousness and true holiness."

Likewise, from Colossians 3:9 - 10 we learn that the new man is "renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him." His thinking has changed and he is being conformed to the character-image of Jesus Christ. He stands justified from sin by faith in Christ (Romans 5:1). He knows where he stands with God, with himself, and with others. Because he is "in Christ," he is free from condemnation (Romans 8:1). His life has been changed from the inside-out, and now he is more than conqueror through his Lord (Romans 8:37). He is growing in the knowledge of his God-given gifts, and by the power of the Holy Spirit he experiences expanding fulfillment in ministry and service.

The new man is created for maturity—to grow up in all ways and in all things into Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

Of course, this "new man" includes both men and women. For women in general maturity seems to come more naturally. But for us men it presents a challenge. For most men, maturity is not automatic. Paul writes, "when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11).

Notice, the apostle did not say, "when I became a man, childish things automatically left me." He said he had to *put away* childish things.

Maturity is a decision. In some areas of life it is a daily decision. Maturity is a decision to love, a decision to face one's self honestly, to root out selfishness. It is a decision to change and improve, to take responsibility including responsibility for one's own actions, to deal resolutely with insecurity and fear, to hold steady under pressure and provocation. Maturity is a decision to respond to life and to people rationally instead of emotionally, to get hold of one's emotions, to break out of moods decisively, to stop nursing one's feelings (remember, *our feelings have no brains!*). Maturity also involves defining clear and realistic objectives in the will of God and remaining true to them.

Let no one dismiss this as starry-eyed idealism. On the contrary. This freedom is God's desire for every man and His norm for every one—man or woman—who has become a new creation in Christ Jesus.

To fulfill this purpose in believers God has committed the full resources of His grace. He has provided the fullness of His Spirit to all who will receive it. To be all that God wants him to be, every man—every believer—needs to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and live the Spirit-filled and Spirits-led life. The Holy Spirit is the Person of the Trinity who brings the full resources of divine grace and power into the life of the believer. His fullness is available to any man who will open up and receive it.

Yes, there is a "man" in deMANd, and such a man will be in demand.