

## Christian Youth Are Not to "Fit In" But to "Stand Out"

*"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence" (I Corinthians 1:26-29).*

### **Introduction**

Very often I see the youth concerned about "fitting in" with friends, at school, or in the society they live in. Looking pretty, building strong muscular bodies, having popular friends, wearing fashionable clothes, are the attributes and preoccupations of most of modern time young generations. Yet, are such desires attainable? Are such desires worth all the anxiety and stress experienced to attain them? I think, given the earthly fleeting state of the human nature, transient outward appearances; ephemeral situational friendships and constantly changing clothes fashion, (the price of which most often determines its popularity rather than its practicality), form an endless race with no finish line on the horizon.

Appearance is a constant changing phenomenon during our growth and development over which one has no control. Popularity is generally a matter of perception, and social friends are circumstantial; usually coming in and going out of our life through the years. So, where is the stability in these often unprofitably sought out attributes? If that is the nature of earthly things, why is it then so important to "fit in", when one truly will never find the absolute and final match?

For a Christian youth, the focus of life should not be on the "fitting in" but rather on the "standing out". That type of mindset makes a youth sensitive, wise, and hardy; capable of withstanding life's wavering circumstances. "Standing out" produces character which assists in developing confidence. For those faithful Christian youth character building, spiritual growth, and participating in fellowship with other Christians who share the same beliefs lay the foundation for long term eternal success.

*"He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Romans 2:28-29).*

### **Who "Stood Out"**

The best examples of those who chose to stand out rather than go with the flow are the twelve disciples. They had been ordinary men in their society following its cultural norms before they were asked to become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some were fishermen, most of them

were Galileans, interwoven with one another as friends from Capernaum, and many came from extended families. For example, before becoming a disciple privileged to write the Holy Word of God, St. Matthew was a tax collector and an unpopular publican. A Jewish tax collector was the lowest social order. Perhaps a Jewish tax collector can be likened to, on the same social spectrum, a harlot or outcast. Thus, we can assume he was definitely not respected, not of the right kinds of associates; and certainly not allowed in the synagogue. Yet we are told in the Holy Gospel he wrote with his own hand:

*"As Jesus passed on from Capernaum, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he arose and followed Him" (Matthew 9:9).*

### **What Made Them "Stand Out"**

The answer lies in their determination to follow Jesus. Fully committed in fulfilling their mission, the disciples knew no half measure of responsibility. Their discipleship to the Lord left no room for worldly popularity; nor were they ever concerned with what others possessed. Covetousness did not defile their hearts which they kept purely dedicated to serving their master. As their faith grew stronger and their purpose clearer, "fitting in" got replaced with "standing out" for the faith they had become impregnated with. Because of their devotion and commitment there was no plan B "for if they should fail". On the contrary, they were determined to die for their cause or rather their Master's, aiming at one goal and one goal only *"to enter into the joy of their Lord"* (Matthew 25: 21). That is why they were destined to succeed because they allowed the Holy Spirit to work in them to accomplish God's will. The world did not see the humble, the meek, the patient, the quiet in their service; and they did not care; because they were sure of the One who could see and reward NOT with fame, earthly richness, worldly pleasures; but with DIVINE JOY and PEACE they experienced both during their earthly life and in Eternity. That unfathomable PEACE and JOY made them welcome pain, need, hardships and aspire for martyrdom in order to extend that Joy in heaven.

Thus, by obeying and following the Lord Jesus Christ and "standing out", the twelve apostles were transformed into revered leaders and had great and respectable teaching authority in the early church. From the ends of the earth, yesterday and today, men know the names of the twelve apostles and much about the historical missions of those men who sinned and repented, whose faith became stronger, that paid dearly for the price of commitment, and who until the Day of Pentecost did not comprehend fully well the power of God. The apostles inspired teachings WERE the rule in the early church. Furthermore, the New Testament Holy Scriptures were written by the apostles or those close to them.

*"They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).*

This power, God's POWER, helped twelve simple, common men to spread the Holy Gospel, found the Church, heal the sick, cast out demons, and see the Lord Jesus Christ in His Glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (three of them did) before His crucifixion and death.

Certainly their origin was common; but through learning to pray, forgive, serve, and evangelize in a matter of perhaps a year and a few months; they were able to convert the world. No lengthy formal learning in the synagogue preceded the astounding accomplishments of those simple men who followed the Man from Nazareth. He called them with one simple command to "follow Me"; and the twelve apostles unquestioningly obeyed without even giving themselves time to think of any repercussions that might result from such a blind obedience to someone they did not know much about yet.

### **Who Enabled Them to "Stand Out"**

We can then deduce that the Lord Himself did the shaping of His disciples in order for them to "stand out" and not blend into society. He took the lowly, common individuals, not from the temple, nor from among the learned and renowned scholars of the day, nor those of extraordinary talents, or the wealthy upper class. Rather He chose the first followers from among those who were very simply willing to follow Him and put Him first in their lives.

Indeed, following the Lord Jesus Christ did not mean popularity or admiration; but was a series of obstacles, fears and challenges. Adversity rather than prosperity was the accepted norm for their lives. Following the Lord meant understanding through sacrifice, learning through patience, and a growing understanding through His teachings. Discipleship to Christ meant a relentless faith the fruit of which was indescribable peace and hope for the better and the everlasting. Thus following the Lord meant "standing out"; influencing others not "fitting in" and blending with them.

*"The things you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2).*

As St. Clement of Alexandria wrote,

"It is neither the faith, nor the love, nor the hope, nor the endurance of one day; Rather, 'he that endures to the end will be saved' (c. 195).

May the Lord bless you as you "stand out" for Him.