

Chivalry

By Sir Knight Jeff Hamilton

Note from the Editor

The material our state supplement editors are publishing is getting better with each issue. Every now and then, I come across something that just begs to be shared with those of you who live in other states. This is such an article. It is published with permission of the author and the owners of the source web site.

While doing some research for this month's Utah Supplement, I came across an article about Chivalry published by "The Internati Fellowship of Chivalry-Now" that I would like to share with you. After all, what is a Knight without chivalry?

The casual reader may wonder what value chivalry could possibly have today. The relevance has to do with the positive contributi of medieval times to our present day culture. By studying these historic roots, we better understand the world we live in. We can start to repair cultural defi which have been long neglected.

The most important factor centers on male issues. Medieval literature is responsible for fostering our concept of being a gentleman. In our everyday interactions, we see how the idea of gen- tlemanly behavior has deteriorated.

Chivalry once provided the foundation for our male code of ethics. As an ethical standard in medieval times, it certainly had its failings. Nevertheless, its influence shaped the basic tenets for European gentlemanly behavior. In the 1700s, it was embraced by our visionary forefathers on this side of the Atlantic, who envisioned proper social interaction as an integral part of what America was all about. The freedom they fought for was not an empty concept. It took for granted personal ethics and responsibility. They knew that, without a moral base, freedom easily degenerates into a social liability instead of serving as a prodigious source of personal inspiration. That the freedom they cherished should be used to protect pornographers and scandal mongers was not their intent. As disciples of the Enlightenment, they anticipated that humanity would progress into something better. They knew that freedom without ethics is like a ship without a rudder-unable to reach its destination, which is the personal fulfillment of us all.

Chivalry spells out certain ethical standards that foster the development of manhood. Men are called to be truthful, loyal, courteous, helpmates to women, supporters of justice, and defenders of the weak. They are also expected to avoid scandal. Beautiful ideals!

The virtues of chivalry offer more than pleasantries and politeness. They give purpose and meaning to male strength and therefore support the over all workings of society. They remind us that Camelot is an ideal worth striving for, the reflection of who we are when we are at our best.

Here is a short summary:

Truth provides the foundation of chivalry. A man who lies cannot be esteemed. Truth should always remain our greatest concern.

Loyalty denotes a relationship that is based on truth and commitment. If we are fortunate, we have companions who are loyal to us, but we must be loyal to others as well. Remember, loyalty is a virtue to cultivate, even when it is not reciprocated.

Courtesy provides the means for cordial and meaningful relationships. A society cannot be healthy without courteous interaction. We sometimes admire people who trample on courtesy to get what they want. Unfortunately, the contentious world they create is very disappointing, and we all have to live in it.

Chivalry calls men to honor women, and to serve as their helpmates. This precept merely states the natural order of things. Men should honor women not only as individuals but also as conduits and nurturers of life. That certain men commit violence against women or treat them with disrespect is an outrage against nature and a slight against manhood.

Justice involves little more than treating people fairly. It also calls for mercy. We all make mistakes.

We admire men who are strong, but if their strength is not directed to uphold what is good, what value does it have? We are called to use our strength to defend those who cannot defend themselves and to commit ourselves to just causes.

Nothing is more unmanly and corruptive to society than delighting in scandal and gossip. Not only do you harm those who are victims of gossip, you harm yourself as well. How? By becoming a creature who is unloving. It is wrong to delight in the guilt or suffering of others or to feed the flames of scandal, a major occupation of nightly television. No one is perfect. That fact in itself unites us all.

Chivalry also speaks about romantic love. People today often find romantic love disappointing. It promises more than it delivers, especially in regard to permanence. Why? Because we perceive romantic love as something spontaneous, something that does not demand work and a strong moral base. Medieval literature tells us quite the opposite. The very essence of romantic love is commitment. This is where chivalry provides a vital ingredient. Love relationships provide the laboratory where the virtues of chivalry are tested to their fullest and manliness is proved. An added bonus shows that proper love encourages us to do our best in all things.

We often take ourselves for granted as if our beliefs and behaviors are fixed in stone. The truth is that we are creatures constantly in the making. We either move forward in our development, or backward. Staying still is the same as going backward. Why? Because the movement of time never holds still. We either progress with it or are left behind.

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