

Theodore Roosevelt: Strength and Decency

1:45 min.

It is peculiarly incumbent upon you who have strength to set a right example to others. I ask you to remember that you cannot retain your self-respect if you are loose and foul of tongue, that a man who is to lead a clean and honorable life must inevitably suffer if his speech likewise is not clean and honorable. Every man here knows the temptations that beset all of us in this world. At times any man will slip. I do not expect perfection, but I do expect genuine and sincere effort toward being decent and cleanly in thought, in word, and in deed. As I said at the outset, I hail the work of this society as typifying one of those forces which tend to the betterment and uplifting of our social system. Our whole effort should be toward securing a combination of the strong qualities with those qualities which we term virtues. I expect you to be strong. I would not respect you if you were not. I do not want to see Christianity professed only by weaklings; I want to see it a moving spirit among men of strength. I do not expect you to lose one particle of your strength or courage by being decent. On the contrary, I should hope to see each man who is a member of this society, from his membership in it become all the fitter to do the rough work of the world; all the fitter to work in time of peace; and if, which may Heaven forbid, war should come, all the fitter to fight in time of war. I desire to see in this country the decent men strong and the strong men decent, and until we get that combination in pretty good shape we are not going to be by any means as successful as we should be. There is always a tendency among very young men and among boys who are not quite young men as yet to think that to be wicked is rather smart; to think it shows that they are men. Oh, how often you see some young fellow who boasts that he is going to "see life," meaning by that that he is going to see that part of life which it is a thousand fold better should remain unseen! Instead, go forth, be strong, and above all else, be decent!