

Male and Female, Part I: Biblical Manhood

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THE SOURCE OF OUR QUESTIONS

Our Changing Culture

When you hear the phrase, “Wait until your dad gets home!” what comes to mind? If you’re like me, it’s the memory of a mom – in my case a feisty lady of Germanic descent – reciting this exact phrase after you did something stupid (in my case calling the lady next door a “fat cannonball”). Why did I call her a “fat cannonball”? That’s a good question, and I had lots and lots of time to reflect on the answer because my dad didn’t come home until hours later.

When my dad finally did come home, he (a laborer at the Ford Motor Company) found me hiding in the “Lazy Susan” – a corner cabinet with circular, rotating shelves. A small, feisty little boy of somewhat diminished Germanic descent, I wheeled myself around to the back, apparently hoping that a fortress of Campbell’s soup cans would tempt his wooden spoon toward tastier targets. Fort Andy Warhol was no match for a two-tour Vietnam vet though. It seems that Susan wasn’t just lazy; she was a traitor, too. That round witch literally turned me in.

Yes, most of us have now fond memories of mom threatening patriarchal justice as soon as dad returned from the office or factory. We look back and laugh, hopefully with thanksgiving for the wisdom gained and fondness for a dad that dared to discipline with love.

However, on a more morbid note, have you ever reflected on the deep sadness inherent in this scenario?

For one, this widely shared cultural experience hinges on the fact that mother and child consider dad’s presence at home a peculiar rarity. Only after a long day of work does dad eventually walk through the door. The mother and children, filled with anticipation and eager to reconnect and experience dad’s love and fellowship, then typically find him tired and hungry. With only a few hours before bed, there is precious little time to accomplish all domestic, child-rearing, and marriage-affirming necessities before him. More often than not, the end-result is a tired, frazzled man endeavoring to do too much to do any of it well.

It wasn’t always this way. Prior to industrialization, many more men lived and worked around their families all day, every day. Although agrarian society was hardly a utopia, men once spent more time around their wives and children than they ever do today. Although they didn’t always approach the ideal of biblical manhood, societal structure better equipped them for it. In the past 200 years, our culture changed dramatically – and not always in ways better for men and families.

Our Confusing Culture

Perhaps for this and many other reasons (technological advances unhinged from and concept of transcendent morality, historic abuses in gender relationships, etc.), our culture is confused on the issue of gender. As many theologians and Christians lament, we increasingly live in an age of gender-bending and polymorphous sexuality. To be sure, we hear many openly questioning this drift – another evidence of deep cultural division. As some examples of the confusion:

- “Modern Family” is one of the latest of non-traditional family structures portrayed on television.¹ It’s the story of Jay Pritchett, a man divorced and remarried to woman the age of his two children: Claire and Mitchell. Claire is married to a doofus; Mitchell is raising his adopted daughter with his homosexual lover, Cameron. The show is funny, popular, and stands with a line of others seeking to shape our culture.
- At the same time, Levi’s Dockers recently launched an ad campaign that seems to call men to restore traditional masculine roles – to no small amount of controversy. It read: “Once upon a time, men wore the pants, and wore them well. Women rarely had to open doors and little old ladies never crossed the street alone. Men took charge because that’s what they did. But somewhere along the way, the world decided it no longer needed men. Disco by disco, latte by foamy non-fat latte, men were stripped of their khakis and left stranded on the road between boyhood and androgyny. But today, there are questions our genderless society has no answers for. The world sits idly by as cities crumble, children misbehave and those little old ladies remain on one side of the street. For the first time since bad guys, we need heroes. We need grown-ups. We need men to put down the plastic fork, step away from the salad bar and untie the world from the tracks of complacency. It’s time to get your hands dirty. It’s time to answer the call of manhood. It’s time to wear the pants.”²

Here, in these two socially prominent examples, we see our culture sending two distinct and conflicting messages about the nature of manhood and gender relationships.

The fault line of these cultural rifts runs through the Church as well. Consider that:

- In 2007, the United Methodist Church allowed Rev. Drew Phoenix, a transgender pastor (formerly Ann Gordon), to stay in her position.³ Actions like these, and those pertaining to homosexual clergy and marriage, threaten to further divide the UMC and other denominations.
- However, other churches and church leaders are vigorously engaged in promoting historic Christian teaching on the subject of gender. Many are banding together in organizations like the

¹ Focus on the Family review available at <http://www.pluggedin.com/tv/mno/modernfamily.aspx>

² <http://www.lbhat.com/advertising/dockers-asks-men-to-grow-up-and-wear-the-pants/>

³ Explanatory article available at

<http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=lwL4KnN1LtH&b=2072519&ct=3911067>

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Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood or affirming manifestos like the recent Manhattan Declaration.⁴

Yes, we are a very conflicted society and apparently Church. Nevertheless, some common themes emerge in our culture's divided mind:

- Americans increasingly view gender as a social construct and therefore malleable
- Americans are more sympathetic to autonomous sexuality, free from issues of gender
- Americans are more likely to see historic gender roles as rooted in power relationships
- The thrust of many today (be they ideological feminists, militant homosexuals, and so on) is the eradication of *masculinity* and *femininity* as outdated and outmoded concepts

Our Confusing Traditions

To make matters worse, it's not as easy as pressing the "reset" button. Christian theologians and thinkers note that we should be very careful before running to America's more "traditional" and "conservative" visions of gender, marriage, and family life. If we're not careful, we can confuse our commitment to *sola Scriptura* (acknowledging the Scriptures alone as the highest authority in faith and life) with *sola Americana*.

In that regard, many within the Church seem to think that Ward and June Cleaver personally knew and received premarital counseling from the Apostles; that 'real' men are invariably like John Wayne or maybe – for the younger set - Gaston in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*; and that faithful women are invariably like Michelle Duggar, the home-schooling mother of 19 children featured on a hit cable television show. While there is much nobility in these portraits, to one degree or another, we need to be careful to judge our own understanding in the light of Scripture – not them. They are often off target, albeit in a different direction, or present a noble but unnecessary ideal.

Our Confused Men, Young Men, and Boys

This absence of consensus within the Church and culture is both a cause and symptom of perhaps the most confused generation of men and young men in American history: men called to be men, with no clear understanding of exactly what that means.

THE SOURCE OF OUR ANSWERS: SCRIPTURE

So, how do we answer the question of gender? Of masculinity?

To begin an answer to that question, let me stress that I want to approach it from the perspective of Scripture and Scripture alone. For many of us here this morning, that is a difficult challenge. We all struggle to realize God's vision for our callings as men, women, husbands, wives, and children. We all know those that we love living outside of God's plan. However, culture changes; God does not. In the words of theologian, Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary:

⁴ <http://www.cbmw.org> and <http://www.manhattandeclaration.org>

“Confronted by the biblical evidence, we must make a vitally important interpretive decision. We must choose between two unavoidable options: either the Bible is affirmed as the inerrant and infallible Word of God, and thus presents a comprehensive vision of true humanity in both unity and diversity, or we must claim that the Bible is, to one extent or another, compromised and warped by a patriarchal and male-dominated bias that must be overcome in the name of humanity.”⁵

With that in mind, let’s look again to our text.

The Broader View: Genesis 1:26-28

This is the Word of God:

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, ^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

In these verses, God reveals three primary truths to us:

- God created humans. They are products of divine intent, not blind bio-chemical chance.
- God created humans in his image. We marred that image in the fall, but it remains.
- God created humans in his image, male and female – of equal dignity and worth.

The Closer View: Genesis 2:15ff.

However, when we look to the second chapter of Genesis, we see the creation of mankind, male and female, under a sort of theological microscope. We note some additional details of great importance to the question of Biblical manhood. Let’s read Genesis 2:15ff.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.
¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." ¹⁸ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." ¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name

⁵ Mohler, Albert. "A Call for Courage on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood." Retrieved 2/2010 from <http://www.crosswalk.com/1313855/>

them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam ^[i] no suitable helper was found.²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs ^[i] and closed up the place with flesh.²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib ^[i] he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said,
"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman, ^[k]'
for she was taken out of man."

²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

John Piper, a theologian that I hold in the highest regard, notes four things that bear greatly on this discussion:

- **God creates the man first**

God deliberately did not create Adam and Eve simultaneously. There is a primacy to Adam. It has nothing to do with his worth relative to the woman (Genesis 1:27 establishes the basis of their equality in dignity and worth: their dual creation in the image of God). However, it has everything to do with his function. Adam is the leader, the initiator. Eve is the helper.

Now, I understand that a statement like this might be, for all the reasons mentioned before, offensive to our relativistic society, maybe even your own sensibilities. However, the Scriptures bear out this primacy. Paul notes that there is significance and consequences to Adam's creation before Eve in 1 Timothy 2:13.

- **God gives man the moral pattern**

Even before creating Eve, God entrusted the moral pattern governing creation to Adam (2:16-17). It was then Adam's responsibility to initiate, to lead - instructing his wife in the commandments of God. Instruction was not *solely* Adam's responsibility, for God desires that women teach as well in countless settings and ways. Again, the question is one of primacy. Adam, the man, bore the primary responsibility for spiritual instruction and therefore accountability.

- **God interrogates the man first**

Only if Adam is in this primary position of leadership does it make sense that, at the fall, God first interrogated Adam – although Eve sinned first. He bore the primary responsibility for even her actions.

- **Satan attacks the woman first**

Finally, note that Satan's attack on humanity is on not only them as individuals, but also as a divinely established structure. He seeks to corrupt the marriage relationship by first deceiving the woman and then, through her, the man. It's an inversion, a perversion of not only a specific commandment but also an entire order.⁶

THE IMAGE OF PURE MASCULINITY: CHRIST

Thankfully, whereas Adam fails, Christ – the Second Adam - triumphs. He is the perfect expression of godly masculinity.

Did Christ shy away from his spiritual authority? No. He fearlessly taught as one having authority (Matthew 7:28-29; Mark 1:22). Did Christ use that authority to disregard or dominate women? Absolutely not! He sought the care of his mother even in death (John 19:26). He exalted women by choosing them as the first witnesses of his resurrection (Matthew 28). He afforded them equal dignity by reinforcing the sanctity and permanency of marriage, a teaching designed to restore consideration of women (Matthew 19). He risked public scandal by openly discussing even the weightiest theological issues with women, even those in the lowest cultural position (John 4). Finally and ultimately, he lays down his life for his bride, the Church (Ephesians 5). Christ is a leader, an initiator. Yes, he is first, but – as the Servant of servants - also last.

So, what does biblical masculinity look like? Simply put, it looks exactly like Jesus.

The Essentials of Masculinity

With that in mind, it bears mention that Christ-like masculinity is more a question of essential Spirit-born character and divinely established responsibilities than specific lifestyle choices. If godly character and is present in increasing abundance, so too will a lifestyle reflecting it.

The Liberties of Masculinity

I mention that because many of us in the Church confuse cultural tradition with Biblical teaching. We think that real men spend their time shooting furry animals, wearing flannel, and driving pickup trucks. Sometimes, but not always.

The fact is that men have tremendous liberty to realize Christ-like masculinity in a variety of expressions. Can true, Christ-like men listen to opera and enjoy theater more than Kenny Chesney and Steeler games? Yes. Can true, Christ-like men dress fashionably rather than plod around in jeans and t-shirts? Yes. Can true, Christ-like mine be openly affectionate and warm with their wives and children? I hope so.

True Christ-like masculinity finds expression in a myriad of ways evidencing the character of and obedience to the commandments of Christ.

⁶ Piper, John. "Manhood and Womanhood before Sin." Retrieved 2/2010 from http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByTopic/49/681_Manhood_and_Womanhood_Before_Sin
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APPLICATION

Far from comprehensive, let me share a few applications of the creation identity of man. Hopefully, they will help you conceive of others in your heart and mind.

Application for Men

- God gave you leadership that you might serve him by serving others. Christ-like masculinity views leadership as sacrificial service (Philippians 2). You cannot lead like Jesus without loving like Jesus.
- God entrusts you with the primary leadership of dominion, subduing all aspects creation to the glory and honor of God. Christ-like manhood is therefore a call to industry, to work hard in all the callings of God. Work is not a consequence of the fall. Laziness and apathy are sins.
 - “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).
 - “For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).
- God designates you, not your wife or your children, as the initiator of loving-kindness in your relationships. As we are drawn to the Father’s love because he first loved us in the God-man of Christ, they are to love you in return (I John 4:10). If your wife doesn’t feel loved and adored (as Christ initiates love toward his bride, the Church), you’re sinning and you need to repent. If your children don’t swim in the flood of your affection, you are not reflecting the love that you’ve so richly received from your Father. A note: avoid legitimizing your sin by labeling it “personality”. Sin is a condition, not a personality.
- God designates you to be the initiator in promoting a home of purity and peace, not your wife and not your children. You are the pastor of your home, its shepherd. Your wife certainly has a significant and weighty role in the spiritual direction of your children. However, it’s designed as a complement to your leadership. Do you set the example in your home of pervasive time in the Word, fellowship, and prayer? Do you worship as a family? Do you entice your children with the beauty of holiness, encouraging their obedience and disciplining in love?

Application for Women

- Don’t wait for the culture or even some segments of the church to agree or encourage you in respecting your husband’s leadership and authority. They probably won’t. Similarly, be careful to filter pop culture through your developing Christian worldview. Oprah and Ellen might give you some good ideas from time to time, but – by their own admission – they’re not sharing your perspective of faith.

- Whether he is a Christian or not, lovingly encourage your husband's leadership. If not yet saved, your respect might spur him toward salvation (ex. Christian woman forbid to tithe). If a believer, it will encourage him in his sanctification. Moms: encourage your sons toward loving leadership.
- Express yourself freely and openly to your husband. God does not call his daughters to become Stepford Wives, and we Christian men should not seek them. However, in so doing, be careful to not undermine or disparage him privately or before others. Your husband will make mistakes. Openly rejoice in his successes; quietly encourage him in his failures. This is what God does for all of us.

Application for Children

- God desires that you love your dad *by showing him proper respect at all times*. There should not be a hint of rebellion toward his loving, godly care for you and your family.
- Young men: seek mentors of Christ-like masculinity. Young women: seek mentors of godly femininity. Filter entertainment through your growing Christian worldview.
- If your dad is not yet a believer in Christ, pray for his salvation. If your dad is a believer, encourage him in his sanctification – encouraging him to lead; to weigh in; to be involved for your good. If you do, you'll be blessed. God's promised that to you (Exodus 20).

PRAYER

Let us pray.