

## Recovering Biblical Manhood

### *Reflections on What It Means to Be a Man According to the Bible*

**Abstract:** Manhood and womanhood are often understood in more culturally constructed ways than we might imagine. What the church needs is a recovery of manhood and womanhood according to the Bible. Towards that end, this seminar attempts to (a) challenge some of the culturally conditioned understandings of what it means to be a man, (b) cultivate a vision of manhood that is built on God’s Word, and (c) offer practical suggestions for how biblical manhood fleshes out in day-to-day life.

## General Outline

- I. Current Need for this Conversation: Problem and Attitude
- II. Challenging Your Cultural Manhood
- III. Cultivating Biblical Manhood 1.0: Biblical Foundations for Manhood
- IV. Cultivating Our Manhood 2.0: Manhood and God’s Big Picture
- V. Cultivating Manhood 3.0: Christ and Manhood
- VI. Conclusion: Manhood at Home, in the Church, For the World

## Seminar Outline Notes

- I. **Current Need for this Conversation: Problem and Attitude**—Sometimes, you have conversations about something and all of a sudden you stop and think to yourself, “why in the world are we talking about this?”
  - a. The Need:
    - i. Sin and Gender Confusion in the Past and Present<sup>1</sup>
    - ii. Sin and Noetic Effects<sup>2</sup>
    - iii. Salvation in Jesus<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For some discussions of current issues, like that of transgenderism, see Gavin Peacock and Owen Strachan, *What Does the Bible Teach About Transgenderism? A Short Book on Personal Identity*. (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Noetic effects refers to how sin has impacted our mental activity or thinking. Stephen K. Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin: A Historical and Contemporary Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000). Also see, John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010). Consider the common saying in our culture. “I am a man stuck in woman’s body” or “I am a woman stuck in a man’s body.” These are thoughts and feelings that do not correspond to biological reality. The root cause, as I’m arguing here, is sin. Sin is not merely things that we do but constitutes our unregenerate (and now natural) state.

<sup>3</sup> So, when it comes to *thinking* about manhood and womanhood, we can expect confusion because sin has wreaked havoc on the human mind. What we need is renewed or new-creational minds that are soaked with the Bible. The imagery of Scripture as spectacles is borrowed from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008).

- b. The Attitude:<sup>4</sup>

## II. Challenging (Y)our Cultural Manhood

- a. How would you define what it means to be a man?
- b. How does our culture define manhood?
  - i. Cultural Confusion
  - ii. Cultural Moment and Masculine Toxicity
    - 1. Nine Characteristics of Toxic Masculinity:<sup>5</sup>
      - a. Being Stoic
      - b. Promiscuity
      - c. Champions of Heterosexuality (automatically bent away from homosexuality)
      - d. Violence
      - e. Dominance
      - f. Sexually Aggressive Towards Women
      - g. Not Being an Ally to Women in General
      - h. Risk Takers
      - i. Lazy at Home
    - iii. The Culture and *Your Idea of Manhood*: What comes to mind?<sup>6</sup>
      - 1. **Who** do you think of when you think of someone who embodies masculinity?
      - 2. **What** words might come to mind that describe masculinity?

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<sup>4</sup> We also respond to this conversation continually. The need for continuing conversations about such things like manhood, womanhood, the Trinity, the inspiration and authority of the Bible, the gospel of Jesus, and the like is because our call is to make disciples of Jesus until he returns or calls us home. As we do, generations arise that have not been taught. As one friend has said, the church is always invaded by barbarians. We call them “children.” And we must teach them the faith once for all delivered. So we cannot look at manhood/womanhood and say, “we’ve figured that out, handled it, and therefore can now move on.” Discipleship requires us to rehash old truths in new ways in every age.

<sup>5</sup> Adam Gallie, “What are the Top 10 Toxic Masculinity Behaviors,” <https://www.aurorand.org.uk/news/top-10-toxic-masculinity-behaviours>.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, I am not advocating that cultural ideas of manhood are meaningless and we are always free to cast them aside. As we try to model biblical manhood and womanhood, paying attention to cultural norms is important. We do not want to promote or add to gender confusion. This, it seems, is what stands behind some of Paul’s comments to the Corinthian church (1 Cor 11). The issue, it seems, was maintaining the distinction between men and women. Yet, we must note that at times, the way the culture has defined manhood/womanhood needs reforming.

3. **How** do men appear (or what do they wear)?<sup>7</sup>

- c. What things do you see in our world today that highlight the confusion we face concerning manhood and womanhood?

**III. Cultivating (Y)Our Manhood—Biblical Foundations for Men as Human-Beings**

- a. Manhood at 30,000 Feet<sup>8</sup>
- b. Stating the Obvious—Where do We Begin?
- c. Relying on Revelation:
  - i. Thinking from Scripture: God Speaks<sup>9</sup>
  - ii. Natural (or General) Revelation
- d. The Humanity of Men: Six Ideas
  - i. Creator/Creature Distinction<sup>10</sup>
  - ii. Original Man: *Imago Dei*<sup>11</sup>
  - iii. Created for Glory<sup>12</sup>
  - iv. Fallen Man: The Effects of Sin

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, it is consistently noted by historians that Ancient Egyptians and others regularly used cosmetics on both males and females (see “Dress: Clothing”, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dress-clothing>). Also see, <https://history.howstuffworks.com/history-vs-myth/ancient-egyptian-cosmetics.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> In other words, this section is not restricted to men only. Men and women are both created in the image of God, are affected by sin, redeemed through faith in Jesus, and will one day be glorified at the return of Christ and the future resurrection. Yet, any understanding of manhood rightly begins by locating our manhood in God’s original designs for humanity in general. This, it seems, is where we often go astray. We go astray in our thinking at times because we have failed to consider the reality that we are human. What does it mean to be a human? Then, what does it mean to be a man within the human race. Therefore, understanding our humanity is foundational.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, this presupposes that God has, indeed, spoken. This is a logical starting point for the whole seminar. We believe that God has spoken to mankind in various ways throughout history (cf. Hebrews 1:1–2). One of those ways is through Scripture, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. Since God has spoken through the Scriptures, then we submit to his revelation as the final rule of faith (what we believe) and practice (how we behave). See Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*, 69–78. For more on how the divine attribute of Lordship as mediated through the Bible, see John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*.

<sup>10</sup> I think this is important for discussions of human identity in general but specifically important for men. Why? Because men, it seems to me, are particularly given towards pridefulness. Of course, I do not mean to say that women are incapable of pride. Of course they are! Rather, in my experience (which is subjective, admittedly), men are prone to pridefulness. For my own thoughts on pride, see Jonathon Woodyard, “The Perils of Pride” in *Before We Forget* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press ; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 442. For a book length treatment of the *imago dei*, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003). John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 2nd ed., rev. expanded (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003).

- v. Redeemed Man: Redemption Promised, Accomplished, Applied<sup>13</sup>
- vi. Glorified Man:
- vii. Synthesis: if we are going to understand what it means to be a man, we first must understand what it means to be human. We are:
  - 1. Creatures
  - 2. Created in the image of God,
  - 3. Created for glory,
  - 4. Fallen in to sin,
  - 5. Redeemed by Jesus,
  - 6. Awaiting glory.

#### IV. Cultivating Our Manhood 2.0: Manhood in the Big Story

- a. God's Big Picture<sup>14</sup>
- b. Meta-Narrative Options (Describe to me how you put together the story of the World/the Bible?)
  - i. God, Man, Christ, Response<sup>15</sup>
  - ii. Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation<sup>16</sup>
  - iii. Big Picture: God's People, in God's Place, Enjoying God's Rule<sup>17</sup>
- c. Manhood in God's Big Picture

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<sup>13</sup> The following wording is adapted from John Murray, *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> Again, this is adapted from Goldsworthy and Vaugh Roberts, who has distilled Goldsworthy in his work, *God's Big Picture*. I've adapted the third point by adding the word "enjoying." This is meant to infuse Goldsworthy/Roberts with a bit of Christian Hedonism and that idea that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him (John Piper, *Desiring God*).

<sup>15</sup> This is way Greg Gilbert structures his book on the gospel (Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?, 9Marks Series* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> I think this structure is helpful in that it connects the story to larger ideas and captures the end (or new beginning). Of course, others argue that to understand the storyline of the Bible, you must pay attention to the progression of covenants. This, too, is convincing. For the heavy lifting on this point, see Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> The postmodern world we live in often rejects of the idea of a metanarrative. That is, there is no single narrative that makes sense of all reality. Yet, the Christian worldview presupposes a metanarrative. The story of the world is written by a single author with a single aim. The best works I have found for understanding this story are as follows: Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2002). Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002). James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010).

## V. Cultivating Manhood 3.0: Christ and Christ-Like Men

- a. Ultimate Man: Jesus as the Man *Par Excellence*<sup>18</sup>
- b. The Manhood of Jesus: Character<sup>19</sup> and Work
  - i. The Character of Jesus:
    1. Faithful
    2. Humble
    3. Compassionate
    4. Patient<sup>20</sup>
    5. Emotional<sup>21</sup>
    6. Bold
    7. Courageous
    8. Wise/Thoughtful
    9. Loving<sup>22</sup>
  - ii. The Work of Jesus
    1. Leader<sup>23</sup>
    2. Provider

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<sup>18</sup> To live as a godly man is to pursue Christlikeness. Therefore, we need to understand what Christ is like. I find some agreement with Aimee Byrd and her argument that manhood and womanhood is the pursuit of Christlikeness (see some of her argument in *Recovering From Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*). However, it is surely the case that what it means to be a Christlike man does not look exactly like Christlike womanhood. Though our common pursuit is Jesus, the way that plays out practically will have gender specific applications. For instance, to pursue Christlikeness as a husband means to lead at home, a calling that a woman does not have *in the same way as men* in a complementarian scheme.

<sup>19</sup> A study of the character of God would benefit anyone seeking to live as a biblical man or woman. Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> See Erik Raymond, “Love is Patient,” The Gospel Coalition (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/love-is-patient/>). Also Edward T. Welch, *A Small Book about a Big Problem: Meditations on Anger, Patience, and Peace* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> John Piper writes, “One of the reasons the Psalms are deeply loved by so many Christians is that they give expression to an amazing array of emotions.” Tony Reinke, “What the Psalms Do,” Desiring God (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-the-psalms-do>).

<sup>22</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Great Leader Great Teacher: Recovering the Biblical Vision for Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006).

### 3. Protector<sup>24</sup>

#### c. Christ-Like Men

##### i. The Character of Christ-Like Men

1. Faithful
2. The Others-Oriented Life
3. Compassionate (or Gentle)<sup>25</sup>
4. Patient
5. Emotionally Intelligent<sup>26</sup>
6. Bold
7. Wise/Thoughtful

##### ii. The Work of Christ-Like Men

1. Lead
  - a. Servant leadership
  - b. Taking Initiative
  - c. Setting an Example
  - d. Leading with an Ear (i.e. listening)
2. Provide
  - a. Emotionally<sup>27</sup>
  - b. Spiritually
  - c. Materially

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<sup>24</sup>Timothy Z Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010). Also see Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Shepherding God's Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel Inc, 2014). On of the things a shepherd does is fight off wolves. David did this when he faced Goliath. Jesus is the Greater David, facing a greater enemy. See David Prince, "A Simple Guide to Reading and Applying the Bible with Jesus as the Hero – David & Goliath (1 Samuel 17)," Prince on Preaching (<https://www.davidprince.com/2015/03/16/a-simple-guide-to-reading-and-applying-the-bible-with-jesus-as-the-hero-david-goliath-1-samuel-17/>)

<sup>25</sup> Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Leaders are now starting to pay attention to EQ, not merely IQ, when it comes to hiring team members. Simply enter the phrase "emotional intelligence" into Amazon and note how many books pop up for purchase. Also, see this post by Nathan Millican (<https://theologyalongtheway.org/2014/05/16/a-brief-explanation-of-emotional-intelligence-from-dr-thom-rainer/>).

<sup>27</sup> This includes sexually, which we do not often like to talk about. But providing for your wives intimate needs is part of being a faithful husband (cf. 1 Cor 7).

### 3. Protector

## VI. Manhood at Home, in the Church, For the World

Let me see if I can wrap up with a few paragraphs:

First, we need to continually think about how we live in this world as men. We begin, however, by trying to understand what it means to live as human beings created in the image of God for the glory of God.

Then, we begin to think about how to live as *male* human beings, instead of female. And at that point we come to see that in the Bible, our differences are biological, physiological, and *functional*. Men have specific roles to play. From a Christlike character, we lead, provide, and protect. And we do that at home, in the church, for the world.

At Home, we **lead** our families and those in our sphere of influence to embrace Jesus and honor him. We have a bent towards **providing and protecting** those around us.

In Church, men step up to lead spiritually. Those who qualified lead as pastors (cf. 1 Tim 3:1–8) set out to teach the Word of God to the people of God.

For the World, is why we seek to act like men. We want the world to see Christ in us. We want them to see and to savor king Jesus.