**Biblical Masculinity, Part I[[1]](#footnote-2)**

**I. Introduction** [Pray]

What does it mean to be a man in the 21st century? When we look to popular culture, we see macho cowboys *and* sensitive stay-at-home dads. We see men in public leadership brag about their promiscuity on the one hand; we see 35-year old dudes playing video games in their mom’s basement on the other. We think of the sort of man we would like our sons to grow up to be; or we think of men who have hurt and mistreated us. All this can lead to terrible confusion about a really important question: is there anything distinctive about manhood? And even if there is something to being “masculine,” is it good? Is “masculinity” something to which male humans should even aspire?

This morning, we’ve got to acknowledge the brokenness and confusion that our culture at large and many of us have experienced on this topic. And we must turn to the teachings of Scripture in order to see what **God says** about true masculinity.

**II. Review**

Let’s begin by turning again to **Genesis 1:26-27** and reviewing what we saw last week. God’s Word says,

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”*

*So God created man in his own image,*

*in the image of God he created him;*

*male and female he created them.*

The Bible begins by stating that men and women are **equally** made in the image of God. They share **equal** *value, worth, dignity, and importance*. There is **no** superiority, and **no** inferiority.

Yet while they possess an equality of essence, from **Gen 2** we saw significant distinctions between the first man and first woman and the inclinations that they would have toward fulfilling God’s creation mandate. These inclinations were reinforced in **Genesis 3**, as God outlined different consequences of sin for the woman and man. I stated that the distinctions between men and women, and the roles they play in the home and in the church, *aren’t* the sinful result of the fall. And they’re not obliterated in redemption as we saw from **Gal 3**, **Eph 5** and other NT texts. Men and women are designed by God to complement each other with **distinct dispositions** and **beautiful roles to play** according to his design.

From Gen 1 and 2 we also saw that gender was given to us by God. It’s his gift. Gender therefore is real, good, and defined by God. Being male or female is part of a person’s essence. This flies increasingly against the cultural winds which say gender is only a **“social construct:”** an idea or perception of gender that the world or society around us has defined, with no necessary connection to our physical sex.

The Bible disagrees. Gender ***is*** a construct – **a divine one**, and thus beautiful and part of his wise plan! Yes, there are certain cultural expressions of maleness or femaleness, but that doesn’t mean that gender is *only* cultural. That’s why I’m using that term “gender” to refer **both** to our physical sex and to how we behave socially as men and women. Men and women share a common humanity, equal in value, but we’re **not** identical. To be clear, we shouldn’t be surprised that our sinful, fallen hearts may struggle to see or appreciate God’s design. And it’s certainly possible in a fallen world for some people to feel confused by or uncomfortable with their gender. But such discomfort doesn’t prove that gender itself is fluid. We’ll have more on that in a few weeks.

What we’ll see in our course is that the relationship between men and women isn’t meant to be a **parade** with one in front and one in the back. It’s not a **race** where the two try to elbow past each other. Rather it’s a ***dance*.** The two genders in this dance have different steps or dispositions, and yet together they move as one, in perfect harmony. They need each other, and their differences are part of the beauty of the dance. Today, we want to ask, what is distinct about the male partner in this dance?

Because we want to be careful to stay within the bounds of scripture on this important topic, let me give you 4 **opening considerations** as we begin this lesson.

**III. Opening Considerations**

1) **We should distinguish manhood from boyhood**. Biblically speaking, while it’s fruitful to discern the differences between men and women, when it comes to how men should live, the emphasis isn’t exactly so much “be masculine instead of feminine” – the Bible basically assumes that. Rather, it puts more stress on “be like a man instead of like a boy.” The book of Proverbs warns us men against the folly of youthful thinking and living. There are certain vices, that while common to all humanity, seem especially endemic to young men. Biblical masculinity is especially seen in **young men growing to maturity**.

2) To live as a **godly** man or woman, [on one level, simply] seek **godliness**. When it comes to our Christian discipleship, there’s much **overlap** for men and women. We’re both heirs in Christ. The New Testament only occasionally gives the two genders different instructions. Rather, generally, we are all to take up our cross and follow Jesus. So if you’re here today and you want to grow as a Christian man (or a Christian woman, for that matter), you have the whole Bible at your disposal! Pray that the Holy Spirit would grow the fruit of the Spirit in you, as we see in Galatians 5. That you would grow in virtues such as love, peace, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.

3) This class, though, is focused on the very specific question of what tends to be distinctive about being a godly **man** in particular. Yes, much of Christian discipleship is the same for men and women. But not all of it. As a man, you’ll always express the fruit of the spirit ***as a man***, not as a generic, genderless person. So our hope is to describe what are the “family resemblances” of dispositions that all men tend to have in common according to God’s created design.

4) But whenever we study God’s creation design, we need to remember that creation is fallen. This means some men will exhibit these tendencies more than others. Others may find these tendencies *feel* less “natural” to them. The fall has made it difficult to perceive God’s design sometimes. The goal is simply this: seek to live with the grain of the gender God has made you to be. For some, that may be relatively straightforward; for others, that may require seeking considerable wisdom for your personality, your context and your culture. **QUESTIONS?**

So, with all of that in mind, let’s turn in the 2nd page of your handout to:

**IV. Foundations for Biblical Masculinity**

Let’s look again at **Genesis 2**. We’re going to focus on the account of creation and fall in Genesis today because it’s so foundational for seeing God’s original design for men and women. When we turn to the New Testament, **Jesus[[2]](#footnote-3)** and **Paul[[3]](#footnote-4)** quote and allude to **Genesis 1-3**, showing they saw these chapters continue to be both relevant and authoritative.

**A. Adam, the Ground (*Adamah*), and Exercising Dominion**

So, let’s look first at a scattering of verses that show Adam’s connection to the ground.

1. Gen 2:5: “When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was *no* ***man*** *to work the* ***ground***.” Literally, there was no “Adam,” man, to work the “Adamah,” ground. It’s as if the existence of uncultivated ground calls out for someone to bring order out of chaos, just as God himself did in 1:2 with the earth when it was formless and void.
2. Gen 2:7: “Then the LORD God formed the **man** of dust from the **ground** and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” He forms Adam of dust from the Adamah.
3. Gen 2:9, “And out of the **ground** [Adamah] the LORD God made to spring up every tree… verse 15, the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it… verse 19, out of the **ground** [Adamah] the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.” Here we see Adam, made from the ground, **exercising dominion** over other species that were also made from the ground by naming them. There are echoes here of God exercising his dominion by naming parts of the creation in chapter 1. Recall that part of God’s mandate for man and woman in Genesis 1 was to have dominion over all the animals. It seems that the man, by virtue of being created first and being created from the ground like these other beings, has a distinctive tendency to bring order and dominion to God’s creation. It’s not that women don’t exercise dominion – they do. But the man is doing it before the woman comes on the scene. As we’ll see in future weeks, she isn’t created from the ground, but from the man. Just as he seems oriented distinctively to working the ground, she seems oriented distinctively toward the man – in other words, her special concern is the wellbeing of her husband and by extension her family.
4. Fast forward to Gen 3:17-19, where we see that the ground, the Adamah, is cursed because of Adam’s sin: “And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the **ground** because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the **ground**, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” The fact that working the ground is cursed suggests that working the ground is a key puzzle piece of masculinity.

That leads us to a related point, another puzzle piece:

**B. Working and Keeping**

Let’s look again again at **Gen 2:15**. “*The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden”* **for what purpose**? “*to work it and watch over it”* (HCSB), or “*work and take care of it”* (NIV), or “*work and keep it”* (ESV).

That word for “*work*” also means “serve,” or “labor” or “cultivate.” That’s man’s role both in the garden and after the fall too: if you look at 3:23, it says “the LORD God sent *him* out from the garden of Eden to **work** the **ground** from which he was taken.” The point isn’t the ground as much as it is “working” – as the Bible unfolds, we’ll see that not all men are called to be farmers. But rather the point is that men seem wired to represent God’s dominion through the **work** that God calls them to do. For Adam, the garden was the world. It was the realm where Adam was to live out his God-given responsibilities.

“So, men, an implication of this is that we’re called to “work” in whatever “**garden**” God has given us: to invest our time, energy, and ideas on bringing good things into being, so that we can provide for ourselves and be generous with others. A faithful man is one who has devoted himself to cultivating, building, and growing”[[4]](#footnote-5) – using your work to make the world a more orderly place. That’s true whether you’re a waiter, an Uber driver, a hill staffer, lawyer, or carpenter. And we cultivate not just jobs and tasks but people too. Think of Eph 5, where husbands are called to “**nourish**” their wives. Or Eph 6, where fathers are called to raise their children in the “**nurture**”of the Lord (KJV). A man’s fingers should be accustomed to working in the soil of the human heart. Richard Phillips puts it well:

*This biblical mandate to work - here with the emphasis on cultivating and tending - explodes a great misconception regarding gender roles. We have been taught that women are the main nurturers, while men are to be “strong and silent.” But the Bible calls men to be cultivators, and that includes a significant emphasis on tending the hearts of those given into our charge[[5]](#footnote-6)* - such as a wife, children, fellow church members, friends, employees, colleagues, relatives, the list could go on.

Again, we’re not saying that men are called to work and women aren’t. We’re just noticing that even in the fabric of how God created the first man and the first woman, the man seems to have a distinct inclination toward tending God’s creation.

And the other half of Adam’s calling is found in that second verb translated “*watch over*,” (HCSB) “*take care of”* (NIV) or *“keep”* (ESV). **The word is used of soldiers, shepherds, and priests, even God himself**. This Hebrew word often implies **protection**, and when used of God describes how the Lord guards his people to keep them safe.**[[6]](#footnote-7)**

What we see is that a man is to both wield the plow of provision and bear the sword of protection. As God’s representative in the garden, “Adam was not only to make it fruitful but to keep it safe.”*[[7]](#footnote-8)* And when Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden, in 3:24, the Lord assigns an angel to “guard” – same Hebrew word – the way to the tree of life, since Adam had failed at this job (**Gen 3:24**). Men are created, it seems, with an inclination to risk their wellbeing for the sake of others. To keep safe, preserve, stand up for, to watch over – like a good shepherd.

I hope what you’re seeing so far is that the Bible’s vision of manhood is distinct from the macho clichés in our culture and even in some Christian “manhood manuals.” Sadly, some Christian authors have taught that men need to get outside of humdrum, boring every day life in order to find that they are truly “Wild at Heart.” What we see in Genesis 2-3 is that masculinity isn’t primarily about big battles and adventures. It’s primarily about tending whatever garden has given us, providing for others’ needs and protecting them with sacrificial love. You can do that whether you’re a hunter or a kindergarten teacher, whether you build canoes with your bare hands in your free time or write poetry. **QUESTIONS?**

Let’s turn next to what I’m going to call:

**C. A Pattern of Responsibility**

Again, let’s consider some of what we see in Gen 2 and 3.

1. First, note that God formed the man first, then made the woman. In 1 Tim 2:13, Paul teaches that being made first signifies Adam’s **authority.** He’s alluding to a common notion in biblical teaching that being the “firstborn” implies authority. Israel would be called God’s “firstborn” son, reflecting the nation’s responsibility and authority to image God before the other nations. Jesus is called the “firstborn” over all creation (Col 1:15), referring to his position of authority.
2. Second, note 2:18: “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’” Then note 2:23: the man is the one who names his wife, calling her “Woman.” She too is divinely created, in no way inferior to the man, yet she is distinct, made to be his “helper.” His **authority** is subtly apparent in his naming her. But her value and significance is evident in the fact that in verse 24 it’s a man who leaves his parents and clings to his wife. She’s the relational center of the family unit.
3. Third, note what we learn about Adam’s responsibility when temptation enters the picture. Look at Genesis 3:1: “*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”* ***Why did the serpent, Satan, first come to Eve?*** It wasn’t because she was inferior or suffered from some inherent moral weakness. No! ***He tempted Eve because it was a direct threat to Adam’s authority*!** Satan aimed right at the very heart of what it meant for God to make Adam the leader of the marriage, and Eve his helper. So instead of man submitting himself to God, the woman accepting the man’s leadership, and both having authority over creation, here the “**woman listens to the creature, the man listens to the woman, and neither of them listens to God**.”[[8]](#footnote-9) Satan sought to deceive Eve because he knew in undermining Adam’s leadership, he would undo all the good that God intended for them.
4. Fourth, look at what happens in **Genesis 3:8-9**, after they’ve sinned and hidden themselves from God: “*And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to* ***the man*** *and said to him, “****Where are you?****””* Note that God calls out the man first, even though it was the woman who first ate from the fruit. Why? Because Adam holds unique responsibility for their mutual wellbeing! He had abandoned his post as leader. So when God called Adam to account, he was “reasserting the original created order.”[[9]](#footnote-10)
5. And note the death sentence in Genesis 3:19 for all humanity is directed **at the man**. It’s “***because of you****,”* God says to Adam in **Genesis 3:17**, **not** you and your wife, but ***you****,* Adam, that the creation is cursed. Adam functions as the head of all humanity. Eve will give an account, but Adam bears the final responsibility because he represents the human race.”[[10]](#footnote-11) Paul teaches in Romans 5 that because of Adam’s sin, all of us are accounted as guilty. All we’re noting here is that God ordained that it is through the first **man** that our sinful nature comes. And it is Jesus, the second Adam, a man, who brings our salvation.

In other words, it seems that responsibility and even authority, while part of the image of God in men in women generally, are especially associated with manhood. We should expect men to be wired to feel a sense of responsibility for the well being of others. Now, to be clear, just because Adam has a role of authority here doesn’t mean that all men have authority over all women. We must remember that for Adam, the Garden of Eden was a place of **covenantal** relationships – Adam and Eve were bound together in covenanted marriage, and we might also say they dwelled in God’s place as God’s people. When we get to the New Testament, we’ll see that the masculine disposition for responsibility is **formalized into leadership** in the most **covenantal** of relationships – marriage, and in God’s people, the church. A husband is called to lead his wife and family, while male elders are called to exercise authority in the local church. That’s where this pattern of general responsibility becomes most **prescriptive.** But at the same time, we shouldn’t be surprised if men in other contexts and other spheres still sense a proclivity to feel a responsibility for the good of others, even if that sense of responsibility isn’t formalized into a leadership role. Single men in the church should feel a brotherly sense of responsibility to provide for and protect their sisters and other brothers in Christ. In the workplace, godly men welcome a sense of responsibility to care for the needs of others – whether men or women, whether employees or bosses. **Any questions?**

**V. Trust the Perfect Man**

Next week, we’ll look at more texts and find more puzzle pieces of biblical masculinity. But as we close this morning, I want to ask: What should we do if we’ve failed at all this? What should men do if they’ve neglected or abused the callings God has given them? Some men here may need to repent of ways that we’ve been passive or lazy in the work God’s given us to do. Others may need to confess how we’ve failed to honor women, or wronged or objectified, or abused women. God knows all, and he will deal justly with all men who don’t forsake their sin.

Some women may ask where they can turn when the men in their life have let them down or have been a monstrous picture of masculinity, not the Biblical one. All of us, whatever our sin or shame, however we’ve been sinned against – we can have hope today. We can all *trust the perfect man, Jesus.* The first Adam served himself and in so doing failed to provide and protect. The greater Adam, Jesus, gave of himself to provide for and protect us eternally. The first Adam was cursed for eating from a tree; the greater Adam was cursed in our place by hanging on a tree. The first Adam’s sin led to a curse on the ground; the greater Adam was buried in the ground and rose from death to undo the curse on creation and give us his resurrection life. Jesus is the faithful Bridegroom who always loves, nurtures and cares for his Bride. Our hope is in him.

1. West Hall Intro Suggestion: What is masculinity? Why is it that when we consider the idea of “manliness,” many of us envision a 5-star general or a cowboy or a hunter... rather than first thinking of Jesus, the only perfect man? We’re going to look to the Bible to talk about what is manhood this morning in our class on gender, right here in the Main Hall. All are welcome. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. E.g., **Matthew 19:4-5, Mark 10:6-8** [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. E.g., **1 Cor 11:8-9, 1 Tim 2:12-14** [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Paraphrase of Phillips, Richard D. *The Masculine Mandate* (Reformation Trust: Harrisonburg, 2010), pg. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Ibid., 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. *I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you...”* Gen 28.15. Or Ps 121.7. “*The LORD will keep you from all harm — he will watch over your life; 8 the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.*” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Ibid, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Smith, Clair. *God’s Good Design* (Matthias Media: Kingsford, 2012), pg. 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Ibid, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Ibid, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)