**Biblical Manhood Resource Paper**

Lightbearers resource papers are designed as a resource to Lightbearers staff as they interact with students and partners and are asked to provide wisdom on a variety of topics. These papers should be considered an internal resource providing clarity on a sound evangelical stance on particular issues.

Foundational to each paper is the perspective that the Gospel is primary recognizing that the Gospel impacts every corner of life (1 Corinthians 6:20); therefore, we aim to provide staff with direction that is Biblically sound and points them to view any issue through the lens of the Gospel.

***What drives this particular paper?*** *Students (along with the rest of western society) are under particular pressure to conform to the new waves of feminism and sexual/gender ideology and to abandon the God-determined differences between men and women. The Bible sees manhood as a distinct blessing to humankind rooted in the created order. The cultural pressure sees the authority of men in the home and the church as inherently evil and anything biblically masculine as necessarily toxic. This paper aims to confront such an understanding and present the God-determined role of men as the intentional design and blessing of God and valuable for the flourishing of God’s people.*

***Male and Female He Created Them***

Due to the modern West’s affection for personal autonomy and expressive individualism, masculinity is coming increasingly under fire. The secular authorities have yielded to international movements such as modern feminism and the sexual revolution which aim to dismantle the Christian understanding of manhood. Christian men in today’s world must proclaim God’s vision of masculinity as revealed in Scripture. This is critical to fulfilling God’s appointed design for men and for the flourishing of God’s people first in the family, then in the church and in society in general.

The Bible understands that men are created beings. And a created thing glorifies its Maker when it fulfills the purpose for which it was created. If I gift someone with a fine handmade candlestick, intended to be used for burning candles and I go to their home to find them using it as a toilet paper holder, I might be glad to see them getting use out of it but is it honoring to me when they misuse my creation for a purpose different than that for which I created it? Men were created for a specific purpose and in the fulfillment of that purpose, when men live as God intended them to live in their masculinity, God is glorified.

So, what do the Scriptures have to say about God’s purposeful design and task for men that they may glorify the Lord as He intended? The first instance of gender specific roles in the Bible is seen in the first few pages of the Bible. In Genesis 2 we see that God makes a man and a woman and from the beginning his intention is to have them joined in sexual union together thus establishing the first marriage relationship. In the creation of man and woman God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The importance of God creating anything after his own image cannot be overstated. This means that the supreme, divine Being of the universe has bestowed on his finite creation a quality that is intrinsic to Him. God bestows this on human beings in particular so that they may display to the rest of the world what God is like. Part of humanity’s reflection of the glory and image of God comes through their distinct qualities of being either a man or a woman. Both the man and woman are designed by God to fulfill the purpose of glorifying God. However, they are not equipped in the same way. Men are equipped/designed by God to perform a certain function which is different from that of the woman.

At this point, something else must be noted. Because God set the first relationship in all of history as specifically engendered and he has given them their task to perform together, it is reasonable to conclude that it is very difficult to define what a man is without woman and vice versa. In other words, a significant part of the man’s design is complemented and assisted by the woman’s design. And the woman’s design is complemented and assisted by the man’s design. When we take a summary of man’s weaknesses, the woman’s strengths will compensate and when we survey the woman’s weaknesses, the man’s strengths will compensate, and thus, the man and woman together are able to more fully perform the task for which they were created: the glory of God. Claire Smith highlights this point by saying, “[The] first human speech recorded in the Bible is a speech of delight about God’s good provision in the creation of woman, and the man’s recognition of their sameness and difference. His aloneness hasn’t been resolved with someone identical to him (another man), or with something foreign to him (an animal), but with someone essentially like him but opposite to him. His other half, his compliment.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

***What is a Man?***

With these things in mind, we can offer a compelling definition for what it means to be a man according to Scripture. For our purposes, John Piper gives the most helpful and comprehensive definition: “At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man’s differing relationships.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Piper deals with each phrase of his definition in turn but there not sufficient space for that here. For now, we will land on the central truth of the task, function, and purpose of what it means to be a man. Let’s call it “sacrificial responsibility”.

At the risk of oversimplification, man’s central purpose can be understood as fulfilled in the acceptance of sacrificial responsibility. “Sacrificial” in the sense that men constantly look for ways to give of themselves to others. Especially those at a certain level of vulnerability whom God has placed under their charge. This of course does not mean that sacrifice is *not* in woman’s design, but that God intends for men to be the initiator and to excel in leadership that is patterned after sacrifice. As the one who has been given authority, men cannot see their position of authority as one to be taken advantage of and have others serve them. Men must give of themselves much like Christ did for his elect. This idea is nowhere more present than in the marriage relationship. Paul, in Ephesians 5:25, says, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

“Responsibility” is the primary word at the heart of mature masculinity. Numerous instances in the Bible depict and command men to take responsibility for those who are presumably under their authority. Again, at the risk of sounding apologetic, we do not say that women are irresponsible or not responsible for anything at all but that men take that primary role as fulfilling God’s design. In the beginning, we see Adam being primarily responsible to obey God’s original command to mankind. In Joshua 24 we see Joshua calling the *men* of Israel to take up their swords and trowels to defend their families and others. In 1 Timothy 3, we see that for a man to be qualified as an elder he must manage his household well. Women are not charged with this responsibility.

***The True Man***

It must be fundamentally understood that the only person to have ever walked on this earth that fulfilled this manly role perfectly is the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the true man who performed his role perfectly. In his sacrificial death on the cross, he undertook responsibility for our sin. He could have left us to die in eternal torment. But, love and glory being his motivator, he made the ultimate sacrifice that will have no rival for eternity and made it so that those who were under his judgment as his enemies are now under his charge as his sons and daughters.

Every man who has ever lived, has Jesus as their perfect model of manliness to imitate. As men of God, the only hope we have of realizing our full potential as men, is obeying Christ in all he commanded. He perfectly obeyed all his father commanded. He took the most awful penalty ever owed to another and he now assumes responsibility for the spiritual progress of His people (Phil 1:6).

It seems fitting to end this section on D. J. A. Cline’s note that, "In Christ man sees what manhood was meant to be. . .The image is fully realized only through obedience to Christ; this is how man, the image of God, who is already the image of God, can become *fully* man, *fully* the image of God."[[4]](#footnote-4)

***Misconceptions***

**1)** Masculinity is often defined by external traits; a man rides a motorcycle or drives a pickup truck; goes fishing or golfing; is loud, aggressive, bearded and boisterous, hangs out with his drinking buddies; likes fast cars, only talks about baseball statistics and so on. While there are external traits that the Bible certainly ascribes to men: short hair, beards, lack of jewelry, strength, the Bible expects more so that men behave a certain way.

**2)** That God’s design for men was that they may exercise authority in various aspects of life seems to be a toxic idea to the modern world. They see any form of authority as inherently bad and refuse to acknowledge that the unjust exercise of authority does not mean that authority itself is unjust. If my wife burns one or two cookies on the tray it doesn’t mean that the whole batch is bad. Being burnt isn’t intrinsic to the cookie and abuse of authority is not intrinsic to authority.

**3)** There are some texts that opponents of biblical manhood will use to dismantle God’s vision for complementarity. 1 Peter 3:7 is often cited as such a text, “husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel” But what does Peter mean by calling women weaker than men? The most helpful argument that can be given is to point to the first part of the verse. Some translations say, “live with your wives according to knowledge”. It seems like there is two ways that Peter means that phrase. The first way is that husbands treat their wives according to how God has designed them. The second way is husbands treat their wives as one who is himself under authority.

First, that husbands treat wives according to their design is indicated in the phrase, “showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel.” Some have found Peter’s “weaker vessel” language highly offensive, especially in the past 50 years. They see it as an insult to women that calls them inferior in some way. And the feminist response is to ignore the passage and say that it’s just Peter being patriarchal and that we as enlightened moderns should never understand that women would be “less than” in anything compared to men. But more likely Peter is saying that there is a God-determined purpose for both genders and God has designed them in order to fulfill their specific purpose. To be more specific, women are inferior to men in performing the purpose for which God designed men; in doing the things that God has specially equipped men to do. In the same way, men are inferior to women in performing the purpose for which God designed women; in doing the things that God has specially equipped women to do. There’s a God-appointed task for men to do and another task for women to do and women are weaker in performing the man’s task. And men are weaker in performing the woman’s task.

Second, when men exercise their God-given authority in the home, church, and society, they recognize that they themselves are under authority. Peter says, “live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.” Peter intends for the man to be constantly aware of how he is living with and treating the woman in his life for purpose of not receiving a deaf ear from the Lord, whose authority he represents. The man’s authority is only what he has been given by God. He must be careful not abuse that authority because to turn a deaf ear to those under your charge, is for God to turn a deaf ear to you.

**Appendices:**

***Q&A*:**

***Is marriage necessary for someone to be “whole”? Or to display the whole image of God?*** No! Genesis makes it clear that the image of God resides in the individual and not the married couple only.

**Can a man like gardening and poetry and not muscle cars and firearms?**

There are qualities intrinsic to manhood that the Bible forbids neglecting and other qualities and actions that it would explicitly condemn. There are many things that fit in neither of those categories and constitute an area of Christian freedom. In doing anything in the Christian life the question should always be asked, “Why?” Why do you want to do the thing you want to do? What is the motivation behind doing that thing? Are you motivated by obedience to the Lord or are you wanting to get as close to the line of disobedience as possible while still appearing obedient? For instance, teenagers often ask, “How far is too far with my girlfriend/boyfriend?” And on the surface that question has the appearance of obedience but dig a little deeper and you find a heart that wants to get as much of what it wants as possible without crossing an imaginary line. The real question should be, “What is most honoring to the Lord?” So, in terms of social practices that appear more feminine, is it condemned in Scripture? Does it go against what nature prescribes? No? Then have fun.

**Are boys under the same stipulations as men? When should someone start pursuing mature manhood?**

The Christian life is all about growth. The Bible doesn’t have the same expectations for boy and girl children than it does for grown men and women. You don’t expect to bench press 315 on your first try. You build up to it. The childhood years are for training young boys to grow up into a mature masculinity. In terms of what age to start officially pursuing manhood, there is no magic number. It is better to start sooner rather than later and let wisdom decide the rest.

**What if a man has been responsible for me who has abused his authority?**

This is a case where we can’t see all men as equal. There are some men who are not guided by the Holy Spirit in all their interactions with others. Those who are under the authority of men who are not worthy of that authority, should not obey those men. Men who abuse their God-given authority are not worthy of being gladly affirmed by those under their charge. If any man leads someone to sin or to harm themselves or others, they must not be followed. Seek help and call that man to repentance.

**Other Resources:**

For questions and resources regarding biblical womanhood see the Lightbearers staff “*Biblical Womanhood*” Resource Paper.

For questions and resources regarding gender identity and our culture’s confusion about it see the Lightbearers staff *“Gender Identity”* Resource Paper.

*The Danvers Statement[[5]](#footnote-5)*

*Recovering biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism.* By John Piper and Wayne Grudem

*God Design for Man and Woman.* By Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger

*A Guide to Biblical Manhood.* By Randy Stinson

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Smith, Claire. *God’s Good Design: What the Bible Really Says About Men and Women*. Youngstown, OH: Matthias Media, 2019.

Piper, John. *What’s the Difference: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999.

Clines, D. J. A. *The Image of God in Man*, Tyndale Bulletin 19, p. 53-103. Cambridge: Tyndale House Publishers, 1968.

1. Genesis 1:26 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Claire Smith, *God’s Good Design: What the bible Really Says About Men and* Women, (Youngstown, OH: Matthias Media 2019), 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John Piper, *What’s the Difference: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway 1990),23. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Clines, D. J. A. *The Image of God in Man*, (Tyndale Bulletin 19, p. 53-103. Cambridge: Tyndale House Publishers, 1968.), 103 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *The Danvers Statement* from the Council of biblical Manhood and Womanhood is a document written by a coalition of well-known pastors, scholars, and ministry leaders from various mainline denominations committed to the biblical vision of complementarity for men and women in the family, the church, and society. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)