

## INTRODUCTION

# What is a Man to Do?

The term “biblical masculinity” is packed with strong opinions, and there are loud voices on the fringes that are dogmatic in their understanding. These clashing opinions are magnified when you begin to peel back the layers of all the terminology involved in these discussions: egalitarianism, patriarchy, and complementarianism, to name a few. Then, the debate gets even more confusing when we begin to attach ourselves to iconic figures in our theological camps. We can go even further; add your background and circumstances to your consideration of such an amplified topic. Suddenly, our minds run wild with fluid definitions and assertive teachings.

What is a man to do? Admittedly, most men will run as fast as possible from the topic. Either the fleeing man will allow the culture to define their opinions on masculinity, or they will hitch their wagon to their favorite theologian’s thoughts and move along. You can imagine what an allowance of cultural pressures will do. Our society is full of extensive feminism, which is not surprising. Also, there is no doubt that culturally the LGBTQIA+ agenda,<sup>1</sup> with its glowing endorsement of

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1. LGBTQIA+ is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual; the presence of the “+” shows that this acronym is always dangerously evolving.

homosexuality and transgenderism, has directly attacked biblical manhood. Furthermore, and very subtly, our culture has often skewed our understanding of manhood. How often do you watch sitcoms, or even children's shows, that display the father as an absentminded buffoon? It is pervasive. Additionally, the problem with hitching your wagon to your favorite theologian is that many men have written very little about this topic, and those who have worked extensively with this subject often have the most troublesome teachings.

But who cares, right? Whatever gets us out of this convoluted discussion the fastest, let's just go with that. Does it hurt anything if we get this topic wrong? I mean, it's not like we are talking about the gospel! We are talking about masculinity. It's not a big deal for egalitarianism to trend upward in most evangelical denominations, is it? Is it any of our business whether a man is effeminate or not the head of his home? Aren't some men just simply better husbands and fathers than others? They are all gifted in different ways, anyway, right?

You have opened the right book if these questions have dominated your thoughts on biblical masculinity. Admittedly, this work will not have all the answers, but Christian men can no longer run away from this topic. Nor can we handle it carelessly.

So, again, what is a man to do? Well, my answer is simple. We must "act like a man" (1 Cor. 16:13-14). Of course, we will need to unpack what this means, but knowing that biblical exhortation helps us realize that our Lord desires men to act like men. That is the establishment of biblical masculinity. Reading this, you might understand my position already. I don't want to be timid about my theological convictions. I believe that by God's design, we are born as men or women and that this God-ordained distinction is not only about ordination or who can preach, but my understanding of the Scriptures establishes a distinction between men and women that functions in all of life. So, the Apostle Paul states that the Christian man must

“act like a man” (1 Cor. 16:13-14). Meaning, we are to fulfill the roles and execute the duties that God has established for us.

As a pastor, how would I explain what Paul means from the pulpit, in a counseling session, or a discipleship group? I must start by saying that biblical masculinity means to be godly and to strive for Christlikeness as a man. That may be shocking, but being a man is not summarized by “being macho.” It is not about being the most muscular stud in the gym, going hunting, dabbling in carpentry, or fixing cars. These are all great skills and hobbies, but the primary quality of biblical masculinity is Christlikeness.

Those who are overly zealous of this conversation might roll their eyes at that last comment, and those soft on this topic might be picturing a soft-skinned, blue-eyed, blonde-hair Jesus with a delicate smile on His face (though, I hope not since that would be a second commandment violation!). Yet, both of those reactions are missing my point. I am not negating hard work, taking care of your body, or leading your family, and I am certainly not imagining an effeminate Jesus. I am stating an essential part of the Christian faith – progressive sanctification. The biblical man should be growing in Christlikeness, and since God created men to be men, we should be growing in biblical masculinity. Besides, didn't our Lord Jesus take on the form of a man when He took on flesh at His incarnation? Furthermore, because He was perfect in His active obedience and full of the Spirit above measure, isn't He the complete picture of manhood? So, it only makes sense that masculinity would be gripped by biblical instruction and growth in sanctified obedience.

Unfortunately, the pendulum continues to swing from inflexible ideologies to spineless compromises. Additionally, our postmodern age has magnified these fluctuating platforms. I have already mentioned the fluid definitions of these conversations but let me take a moment to give two examples. Where does your mind go when I use the term *patriarchy*?

What about the term *complementarianism*? Those two terms are loaded, and attempting to define them to everyone's satisfaction is impossible. Let me prove my point. Imagine the scenario: you read a great Puritan of the faith who speaks to a father-led home. Consider this quote by JW Alexander on the spiritual importance of the father leading his home:

There is no member of a household whose individual piety is of such importance to all the rest as the father or head. And there is no one whose soul is so directly influenced by the exercise of domestic worship. Where the head of a family is lukewarm or worldly, he will send the chill through the whole house.<sup>2</sup>

You read this, and your heart burns with affection and motivation for this duty of fatherhood. As many Puritans did, you take this calling to lead your family seriously, and you begin conducting family worship in your home, praying with and for your wife, spiritually leading your household, and seeing great fruit from your faithful labors. Eventually, your pastor notices the spiritual growth and asks, "Brother, what is different about your family?" You tell him what you have been reading, the practices you have implemented, and how you lead your home as the father and husband. His reaction crushes you: he calls you a patriarchist and begins to lecture you on abuse, domineering attitudes, and complementarianism. In your pastor's mind, patriarchy is always evil, but doesn't the term simply mean "father-ruled?" Does a father-led home have to be an oppressive environment? Undoubtedly, the Puritans did not think that this was the case. Yet, because of the ever-evolving definition of terms and the widespread feminism that has even crept into our churches, patriarchy is defined as harmful. Is this fair? Again, consider the scenario above. What is evil about the outcome of spiritual growth amongst your wife

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2. J. W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2012), 22.

and children? What is oppressive about a man who leads his home well? We should all agree: nothing! We would be praising the Lord for the work that he had done in our home!

However, this is what we are facing. Please understand that I know that the term patriarchy has been negatively impacted by the practices and teachings of those on the theological fringes. There are small sects that have used the term to justify the abuse of their wives and children and the creation of an oppressive home. Abuse is evil; I will be quick to say that, and we all should be. But do we have to get rid of the term completely? Just a thought.

Furthermore, the term complementarian has also been wrongly defined, leading to the prevalence of egalitarianism in many evangelical circles today. Complementarianism has rightly taught that God created males and females both in His image but with differing fittingness to execute their duties as men and women. Yet, sadly, this term has been weighed down by significant baggage in the past few decades. More and more, complementarianism is being misunderstood and mistaught to mean that men and women possess the skills to do the exact same things. Even more, that men and women have the same gifts, skills, qualities to perform identical duties. Complementarianism is becoming the compilation of a few narrow points about wives submitting to husbands in the home (and even that is being attacked in complementarian circles) and the ordination of women in the church. If that's all complementarianism means, we are in trouble. We cannot understand God's created order and our duties as men and women, as we should, until we understand that God made us male and female.

Admittedly, I sound like a broken record as I ask this question again: What is a man supposed to do? In our pursuit to "act like a man" (1 Cor. 16:13-14), we cannot let the fringe theological camps define biblical masculinity, nor can we rely

upon the rapidly changing culture to determine our actions. As men, we must pursue Christlikeness. How is this to be done? We are to plunder the truths of God's Word as the Spirit gives understanding. We cannot rely on fluid definitions and our fear of being labeled to influence our positions. The Word of God clearly defines biblical masculinity, and as we embark to know what the Scriptures say we will see Christ revealed to us, and by the power of the Spirit we will see genuine growth in masculinity intensifying within us.

Yes, this book will address the external works of biblical masculinity. Still, we can only begin that conversation once we consider the internal work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men as He works within us the truths of the Scriptures. The Scriptures alone must define biblical masculinity, and our reliance on seeing more men acting like men will only come to fruition when the Holy Spirit is at work. It's precisely there – the necessity of the Holy Spirit - that we will begin our discussion in Chapter 1.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Why do you think conversations about “biblical masculinity” create such polarized reactions within the church and culture?
- In what ways has culture subtly (or overtly) reshaped our understanding of manhood?
- How does anchoring masculinity in Christlikeness challenge both cultural stereotypes and hyper-rigid ideologies?
- How has your own background, upbringing, or theological influences shaped the way you instinctively respond to the topic of biblical masculinity?