

# Biblical Manhood



What difference does it make?  
by Pastor Evan McClanahan



I have a 12-year-old son on the precipice of becoming a man. He can already beat me at basketball, outsmart me at boardgames, and is only a few inches shorter than me—and I'm 6' 2". Every day, as we drive him to baseball practice, monitor his homeschool studies, or watch as he interacts with young women his age, his mother and I are confronted with how we might succeed—or fail—at his becoming a man of God. Will he grow to agree with our values? Will he seek God's will? Will he become consumed with the cares of the world and the unique temptations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? And am I modeling something that can rightly be called "biblical manhood?"

It is anxiety-inducing, to be sure. Meanwhile, I don't have a monopoly on what "manhood" even means. There are competing ideals to contend with, secular responses to a world that is increasingly weak and unable to deal with the world's crises. *Bronze Age Mindset*, for example, is a popular book that encourages men to look to the toughness and pride found in a more difficult age, a world before feminism. In this world, men could build things, and they were physically fit, sexually aggressive, and unafraid to lead.

While not wrong in championing male leadership, books like this are devoid of an explicitly Biblical worldview. Another more common example for young men today would be the Tate brothers, recently arrested for running a pornographic business. Best known for celebrating muscle mass, hyper-confidence, and getting rich, Andrew and Tristan Tate have a huge following among young men who seem lost and unwanted. In a world where men are told their so-called privilege has made them an enemy, the Tate brothers' cheering on their straight male identity is a breath of fresh air. Then there is Jordan Peterson and

his “clean your room” and lobster-inspired “stand up straight” advice that was in such strong demand because the supply seems so nonexistent.

So, Christians have competition when it comes to defining what manhood is. And even men in the Christian space can reduce manhood to the same kinds of stereotypes the world does, treating young men more like children who need shiny toys than leaders who need a mission. For example, on Father’s Day, 2022, Graceway Baptist Church in Missouri hosted a car show.\* In theory, this would attract men to church since men, you know, like classic cars. This church is by no means alone. I applaud the effort, but the reality is that somewhere between 55-60% of those in church on Sunday are women. And when such stunts go dramatically wrong, like when the pastor rides his motorcycle into the church only to crash, it makes the Church look desperate and foolish.

**So, as Christians not looking for silly answers that pander to superficial understandings of manhood, we need to look to the Bible. Fortunately for us, there is no shortage of men to choose from as role models. Some are more honorable than others, some more virtuous than others, but there are many men that can be emulated. The list includes Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, the prophets, the disciples of Jesus, Paul, and many more. And there is Jesus Himself, “true God and true man,” God’s only Son, born of a woman, born under the Law.**

So, to figure out what biblical manhood is, do we just choose one and make a case study out of him? Or should

\*[www.gracewayonline.com/carshow-2023](http://www.gracewayonline.com/carshow-2023)



we just skip them and go straight to Jesus, the perfect sinless Man? Or do we look not to the men, *per se*, but to what the Bible says *about* men? For example, Paul writes to husbands in Ephesians 5. Old Testament Law has many laws only for men. Do we isolate those, make a list, and go from there?

Both of those approaches would be worthwhile, and we can do some of that in this essay. But, honestly, we have to address an even more important question first, one that if, unasked and unanswered, will greatly impede our progress.

**Can Christians say that while men and women are truly of equal value, they are fundamentally different? Can we say that men have peculiar roles and duties *as men*, roles and duties that women cannot fulfill? Can we say that men are made so differently from women—generally—if not universally; and not just physically but temperamentally and emotionally—that it is actually an offense to God to confuse the roles of men and women?**

I believe Christians must answer “Yes” to these questions if we are to even bother trying to define biblical manhood.

In ancient times, the reality that men and women were created differently was a given, so an explicit case of that is never made. In much of the world today, that remains true. Most cultures understand that men, for example, are, on the whole, physically stronger than women and therefore bear responsibilities that women do not bear. Women,

meanwhile, bear children and are best served (among other vocations, of course) to nourish young children, even as both parents have critical roles in raising children.

I recently attended a friendly debate on the question of women in church leadership. Two women had an amicable dialogue on the topic, and a panel discussion further elaborated the different positions. Bible verses about women being silent were considered and contextualized, particular Greek words were brought into question, and disagreements about the difference between a pastor and a deaconess were all addressed.

But at no point was it stated that men and women are so different that there are some roles that men should have that women should not have and vice versa. It dawned on me that if we are not willing to say that men—*as men*—and women—*as women*—are excluded from certain vocations, then there is little value to defining biblical manhood or womanhood.

So, I want to state clearly that men and women are different, that God made them that way, and that there are things men will do that women ought not do and vice versa. If I had to state the most significant difference between “biblical” men and women, it is that men are given the burden and responsibility of leadership more often than women.

While it would be impossible to consider each and every role in the home and in the world and debate the extent to which men and women can assume such roles, it is the assumption of the Bible that men do lead. Men are priests in the Temple; men are kings; men are prophets; men are judges; men are apostles; men are elders. Yes, women

have some of these roles, like Deborah, but they are the exceptions, not the rule. Men are leaders in the household, on the battlefield, and in the area of spiritual battle.

I do not see this as a demotion for women, even though the modern world says it is. To the contrary, men carry the burden of leadership. They must provide for their family, fight wars, lead congregations, and literally do the heavy lifting and dirty jobs that civilization requires. While some men have taken advantage of their positions of leadership and acted as domineering brutes, this is not how God would have them lead, so they are not acting as Biblical men, either. Indeed, Jesus says, **“But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”** (Matthew 20:26-28).

So, if I have not caused too much offense, and we can agree that men and women are different, and that men bear peculiar responsibilities (as do women), what is biblical manhood? What is unique about being a man in God’s world as opposed to being a woman in God’s world? Both men and women are not to steal, kill, commit adultery, lie, and covet. Both are to honor God and their elders. What does the Bible say that pertains especially or only to men?

I will try to highlight only a few aspects of biblical manhood. And these are not, by the way, totally unique to the Bible. Indeed, God’s Law is known by all people (Romans 1:19-20), so some of this will be held in common even with cultures who have yet to hear or gladly receive the Bible. But here are a few snapshots of biblical manhood.



1. Men bear responsibility of leadership. In the household, on the battlefield, and in spiritual warfare, men lead. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:23, **“For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior.”** Again, this does not mean that men can use this to control women, much less abuse them. But it does mean that men are the leaders of the family. He is, therefore, expected to provide for his wife and children, sacrifice for them, labor without complaint, and protect them when necessary.

The concept of women fighting on the battlefield is completely foreign to the Bible and should be foreign in our own day. Just because warfare is less of a constant threat for the average person in our own day than it was in the Bible, men, by virtue of being the stronger sex, must fight war's battles when the choice is to fight or die.

And spiritual warfare is what the Church, when vocationally correct, is engaged in. The devil has every intention of destroying the work of Gospel proclamation, healing, forgiveness, and community building in the name of Jesus. Therefore, Christians, and especially pastors, will find themselves under spiritual attack when they pose a threat to the devil's domain. Just as no biblical man could conceive of allowing women to fight in an army, no modern biblical man should be able to conceive of women bearing the assaults of the devil on behalf of Christ's sheep.

In areas of politics, business, and civic life, the Bible is less clear about women's roles. That is, while politics is dirty business and the business world is cutthroat, women are certainly more free to pursue careers in those vocations, biblically speaking. And even if men are to be the leaders of the household, battlefield, and Church, that doesn't mean that the job will be done well *because* it is done by a man. Those men must take their leadership responsibilities seriously and seek to lead according to God's Law and calling. The point is that biblical men are called to lead, and a biblical man does not shirk this responsibility.

2. Men are workers. Oh, women work plenty hard too in the Bible! No one has ever worked so hard as a mother raising a child or two or three, among the many other vocations biblical women fulfill. A biblical man cannot, must not, be a non-worker. Paul chastises the men who, believing the resurrection was imminent, refused to work in Thessalonika. He writes, **"But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all"** (1 Thessalonians 4:10b-12, 5:14).

In Proverbs, the lazy man is mocked: **"The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!'"**



(Proverbs 22:13). While there are times when work is hard to come by, and a well-deserved retirement is nothing to fault, Christian men are to work and be providers to the best of their ability.

3. A biblical man, though, does not have to be a physical specimen to fulfill his role *as a man*. Zacchaeus' story (Luke 19:1-10) is not only for children. This "wee little man" was a tax collector who had a habit of ripping off his taxpayers. But upon encountering Jesus, he makes every effort to make amends from those he has stolen from, going above and beyond what the law required.

Zacchaeus is a biblical man not because he is big, athletic, or fast, but because he has the humility to confess that he has sinned against God and man and is willing to set things right. Pride is surely a great sin of many men, which leads to terrible harm and a lack of correction. Zacchaeus is more of a man than any athlete could hope to be because of his remarkable accountability.

4. Biblical men build others up because they make it a habit to **"in humility count others more significant than yourselves"** (Philippians 2:3). Just because men, as the stronger sex, bear more responsibility than women, they are never to use that power in a sinful way. Consider Paul's admonition to fathers: **"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord"** (Ephesians 6:4).

Biblical men pay attention to their children and do not mercilessly or abusively discipline them. Rather, they patiently raise them and teach them. They draw out the best of them. Children are not the objects of men through which mere DNA is passed on or vicarious lives are lived. Biblical fathers view their children as unique gifts from God, who do need to be disciplined, but who also need to be tenderly addressed and cared for so their vocations can be perceived and nurtured.

5. Finally, contrary to what is commonly said about the traditionalist view of these issues, men are to build up their wives. We have already spoken of how men are to protect and provide for their wives. But in the example of Jesus and Paul, we see men lifting up women to unusual heights. While not elevated to the rank of elder or apostle, women were entrusted with the proclamation of the Gospel and many acts of service in the Church. Only a woman receives this accolade by Jesus: **“And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her”** (Mark 14:9).

Pricilla (Prisca) is mentioned before her husband, Aquila, when both are named, an unusual honor for the time. Paul welcomes the ministry of many women as he plants and builds churches, and several are listed in Philippians and Romans 16. Jesus receives many women as disciples. Even in the Old Testament, women had more rights, freedoms, and responsibilities than neighboring pagans

afforded their wives and daughters. This actually led to a diminishment of patriarchalism, because women, while the weaker sex, were not a lesser sex. The creation story itself paints Eve as a partner to Adam.

Biblical men and women are alike in many respects. They have the same callings to be virtuous, obedient, faithful, and gracious. But men and women are different, despite the radical and absurd claims by those in our own day who possess an unbiblical worldview. Their differences mean that their roles will be different. And that is okay. To the extent that men are uniquely called to lead, that is a burden for them, not a privilege to be abused. Rather than warring against the “patriarchy,” we would be wise to support men who seek to faithfully lead in a Biblical manner. The world tells them they are the root cause of so many problems, leading to a withdrawal from leadership or a truncated view of manhood.

I don't know if this essay has answered every question. Surely it did not. But I hope to have painted a picture of manhood that, were my son to adopt it as his own, I would be pleased beyond all expectations as a father. Now, if he can only find a young woman who agrees with God's plans for men and women.

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Oh, that the Lord would guide my ways, To keep His statutes still!  
Oh, that my God would grant me grace, To know and do His will!

Order my footsteps by Thy Word, And make my heart sincere;  
Let sin have no dominion, Lord, But keep my conscience clear.

Assist my soul, too apt to stray, A stricter watch to keep;  
And should I e'er forget Thy way, Restore Thy wand'ring sheep.

Make me to walk in Thy commands—Tis a delightful road—  
Nor let my head or heart or hands, Offend against my God.

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Pastor Evan McClanahan is originally from Shreveport, Louisiana. He was baptized on June 7, 1981, at Saint Luke's Methodist Church. As a son of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Shreveport, he was steeped in Lutheran liturgy and theology. He attended Centenary College of Louisiana and earned a B.A. in music. He attended the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago for three years and had a one year internship at St. John Lutheran in Royal, Illinois. He met his wife Amanda in Chicago, and they married August 6, 2006.

Upon graduating from seminary, he was called to Living Word Lutheran Church in Grapevine, Texas, where he served as associate pastor. In December 2009, he was called to serve as pastor at First Lutheran, Houston, Texas. He and Amanda have two children. While at First, he has initiated several ministries, including outreach to Houston Community College students, the First Word debate and lecture series, and hosting a podcast called *Theology on Air*. He writes regularly for *Everyman Commentary*. Pastor McClanahan has previously served on the Lutherans For Life board of directors.

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