

Future Men

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C A N O N
P R E S S

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This book is dedicated to Heather,
who has blessed us by marrying the man
who was once our future man.

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Introduction

As much as it may distress us, our boys are future men.

I was once leading a seminar for teachers at our Christian school, and in the course of discussion mentioned that many of the girls in the school would, within a few short years, be adult women and would take their place in our midst. The teachers heard all this with aplomb, but when I went on to say that within a few short years the *boys* they were instructing would be lawyers, airline pilots, pastors, etc., the looks on the faces of the assembled teachers ranged from concern to mild panic. Boys take a lot of faith.

This is good because the presence or absence of faith reveals whether or not we have a biblical doctrine of our future. Unbelief is always anchored to the present, while faith looks at that which is unseen. But even here we only get half the picture. Too often we think that faith only looks at unseen *heavenly* things, but this truncated approach is really the result of an incipient gnosticism. In the Bible, faith includes the ability to see that which is unseen because it is still future. Abraham rejoiced to see the day of Christ, not the day when he, Abraham, would go to heaven. Faith conquers kingdoms, faith stops the mouths of lions, faith turns armies to flight, and faith brings boys up to a mature and godly masculinity.

But another qualification must be added. The faith exhibited by wise parents of boys is the faith of a farmer, or a sculptor, or anyone else engaged in the work of shaping unfolding possibilities. It is not the faith of someone

waiting around for lightning to strike; it is the faith of someone who looks at the present and sees what it will become—through grace and good works.

Countless examples may be multiplied from any given day in the life of a small boy. Say a boy breaks a chair because he was jumping on it from the bunk bed. Unbelief sees the cost of replacing the chair. Faith sees aggressiveness and courage, both of which obviously need to be directed and disciplined. Suppose a boy gets into a fight protecting his sister. Unbelief sees the lack of wisdom that created a situation that could have been easily avoided; faith sees an immature masculinity that is starting to assume the burden of manhood.

Unbelief squashes; faith *teaches*. Faith takes a boy aside, and tells him that this part of what he did was good, while that other part of what he did got in the way. “And this is how to do it better next time.”

This issue of fighting provides a good example of how necessary such distinctions are. Of course parents do not want to encourage fighting in their sons. But this is not the only item on the menu. Neither do they want to encourage abdication and cowardice. There are times when men have to fight. It follows that there will be times when boys have to *learn* how to fight, how to walk away, how to turn the other cheek, when to turn the other cheek, and when to put up their dukes. If boys don’t learn, men won’t know. And boys will not learn unless their fathers teach.

When Theodore Roosevelt was at Harvard, he taught Sunday school for a time at Christ Church, until he was dismissed. A boy showed up one Sunday with a black eye. He admitted he had been fighting, and on a Sunday too. He told the future president that a bigger boy had been pinching his sister, and so he fought him. TR told him that he had done perfectly right and gave him a dollar. The vestrymen thought this was a bit much, and so they let their exuberant Sunday school teacher go.

Unbelief cannot look past the surface. If there was any sin involved, unbelief sees only the sin. Faith sees what was turned aside to the service of sin and seeks to turn it back again. Sin is parasitic and cannot function without some good attributes that it seeks to corrupt. Consequently, faith must distinguish that which must be preserved and developed and that which must be abandoned as sin.

In addition, faith also sees the godliness in what many pietists, on their own authority, have come to *call* sin. At the beginning of his life, a boy does not know what century he was born in, and consequently exhibits to many of his politically correct and aghast elders some of the same traits exhibited by the boyhood chums of Sennacherib and Charlemagne. He doesn't know any better—yet. But in our day, many of these designed masculine traits are drilled or drugged out of him by the time he is ten. Faith resists this ungodly process and defines sin by the Scriptures and not by pietistic traditions.

So faith is central in bringing up boys, but it is important to remember that the object of faith is not the *boy*. It is faith in *God*, faith in His promises, faith in His wisdom. Faith *concerns* the boy, and the boy can see that it concerns him. Parents are to believe God *for* their sons, which is a very different thing than believing their sons.

But faith in the wisdom of God cannot be separated from the standard of Scripture. It is easy for us to ask God to give us “faith” to accomplish whatever it is that *we* think is a good idea. But this is not what we are called to do. We are Christians and cannot survive on bread alone. We must live by and on the Word of God.

Because we are wanting to base the training of our boys on the standards and patterns of Scripture, we may be encouraged to look to the promises of Scripture as well. These promises are not a later “add-on”; they are foundational to the whole process. Faith is not wishful thinking; faith apprehends the promises of God found in Scripture. “The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall

be established before thee” (Ps. 102:28). Faith sees a son *as* established, and the work of faith goes on to establish him. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

As we look to the Scriptures for the pattern of masculinity that we are to set before our sons, we will find them manifested perfectly in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the incarnate Word, the One who embodies perfectly all that Scripture teaches in words. As we look at the teaching of Scripture throughout this book on what it means to be a man (and therefore, what it means to be a future man), we will come back again and again to the example of Jesus Christ. He is the one who set for us the ultimate pattern for friendship, for courage, for faithfulness, and integrity.

God is the one who places a specific boy in a particular home. And He does so in order that those parents who believe and obey Him might come to delight in a wise son, a son who is like Jesus Christ. “My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things” (Prov. 23:15–16).

With these introductory things said, a few words are necessary about some overlap with material found in some of my other books on the family. The first point is that while repetition may be a headache for editors, it remains a pastoral necessity (Phil. 3:1). We moderns need to internalize many of these truths, and an important part of this is repetition. Secondly, there are times when a point made in an earlier work needs to be expanded or qualified. Sometimes a point made elsewhere is clear to some and murky to others. Third, although there are some hardy devotees of my stuff who will soldier manfully through more than one of my books, this is not the case for everyone. And because of how the books are frequently used (group studies, etc.), the books pretty much need to stand alone. Not everyone reads the earlier books. And last, sometimes I repeat myself because I am getting older and can’t help it.

The Shape of Masculinity

Before taking a road trip, it is a very good idea to have some idea of where you are going. Before rearing a son to be “masculine,” it is equally important to have some notion of what that is. For Christians seeking to be biblical, it is important to have that definition of masculinity grounded in the teaching of Scripture.

So what is masculinity? What are we looking for when we describe manhood according to the Bible? The answer to that question will inform and direct all our efforts in bringing up our sons. Manhood is where boyhood should be aimed.

Douglas Jones has helpfully argued that masculinity can be thought of as “the collection of all those characteristics which flow from delighting in and sacrificing bodily strength for goodness.” Bill Mouser makes this point even stronger by pointing to the five clear aspects of this kind of masculinity throughout the Bible. As with every such categorization, we cannot make these five aspects watertight, separating them completely from one another, but nevertheless, these *are* distinctive features of the masculine constitution.

Men are created to exercise dominion over the earth; they are fitted to be husbandman, tilling the earth; they are equipped to be saviors, delivering from evil; they are expected to grow up into wisdom, becoming sages; and they are designed to reflect the image and glory of God. Some of these following terms may seem somewhat cumbersome,

but let's call them *lords, husbandmen, saviors, sages, and glory-bearers*.

This chapter will not make a detailed case for these roles but will outline and describe the features of each and then show how each one should manifest itself in the life of boys. Of course, when these are neglected, or worse, resisted, the consequences are very harmful to boys.

Lords: Man was created to exercise dominion in the earth. The charge which God gave in this regard is frequently called the cultural mandate.

And 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 fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. . . . Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it. (Gen. 1:26–28)

Some may assume that this cultural mandate is negated by the fall of man into sin, but God repeats the mandate again after the flood (Gen. 9:1). Sin certainly affected our ability to fulfill this command from God, but it did not remove the obligation placed on us by the command. But if it is to be fulfilled now, in a sinful world, then it must be as a result of the goodness and grace of God. And this is what we see. The mandate is given to us yet again in another form in the Great Commission. We are told there to disciple the nations and bring them to true submission to the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 28: 18–20).

In boys, we might call this the “tree fort” impetus. Boys want to conquer and subdue, and if the terrain before them is the back yard, then that is what they want to conquer and subdue. The point of discipline with boys is to channel and direct their energy into an obedient response to the cultural mandate. It is not to squash that energy, destroying it or making it sullen. Boys therefore should be in

training to become men who exercise dominion, they should be learning to be lords in the earth, they should learn to be *adventurous* and *visionary*.

Husbandmen: Man was created, not only to discover and conquer new worlds, but also to make those worlds flourish. The dominion mandate, taken in isolation, could result in men trying to build a culture based on piracy and freebooting. This second aspect means that men are created to conquer and subdue, and after this, *to settle down*. After man was created, God placed him in the garden to tend and protect it: “the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to *tend* and *keep* it” (Gen. 2:15).

Man does not just build bridges and space stations. He must also tend and oversee the organic things which he plants there—gardens, families, towns. Great lessons can be acquired by small boys in a small garden. A rich farmer was once rebuked for having his sons work in the fields when they didn’t have to. His reply was apropos to this discussion. He wasn’t raising corn, he explained, he was raising boys. Boys therefore should be learning to be *patient*, *careful*, and *hard-working*.

Saviors: Men also have a deep desire to *deliver* or save. The great example of a savior is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. His deliverance was promised to His people in the early chapters of Genesis: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:14–15).

The ancient serpent, this dragon, was the tempter who brought the occasion of sin before Adam and Eve. God promised here a curse on the serpent, and in that curse we see the salvation of the world. That salvation cannot be separated from the destruction of the lying worm. As I write this, my two-year-old grandson is learning the story of St. George and the dragon. It absolutely captivates him, and

he can't get enough of it. He is learning something profound here. Men who follow Jesus Christ, the dragon-slayer, must themselves become lesser dragon-slayers. And this is why it is absolutely *essential* for boys to play with wooden swords and plastic guns. Boys have a deep need to have something to defend, something to represent in battle. And to beat the spears into pruning hooks prematurely, before the war is over, will leave you fighting the dragon with a pruning hook.

The Christian faith is in no way pacifistic. The peace that will be ushered in by our great Prince will be a peace purchased with blood. As our Lord sacrificed Himself in this war, so must His followers learn to do.

Boys must learn that they are growing up to fight in a great war, and they must consequently learn, as boys, to be *strong, sacrificial, courageous, and good.*

Sage: The sage is a man who is great in wisdom, and wisdom in Scripture is personified as a great lady. Sons are exhorted constantly to listen to her. As we look to the first part of Proverbs (1–9), we see that wisdom is a *woman* who disciplines boys. When a grimy little boy needs his knuckles rapped, she is the one to do it. If he heeds wisdom in her role as the strict school-mistress, he grows up to a certain measure of wisdom, and the lady wisdom becomes his patroness. And when a man has grown up to wisdom, he has become a sage.

We must therefore teach our boys the masculinity of study, of learning, of books, of intellectual discussion. Too often we let boys drift into a situation where they pit one aspect of masculinity against another. When this happens, for example, a boy who naturally loves the outdoors can too readily dismiss software programming as effeminate, or, even worse, come to look down on poetry. Intellectual discipline, or, as Peter put it, girding up the loins of the mind, is an important part of growing to manhood.

In boyhood, study looks suspiciously like digging a hole and then filling it up. The author of Hebrews tells us that no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but rather painful. *Afterwards*, he says, it yields the peaceful fruit of an upright life. Nowhere is this principle more clear than in the relationship of study in the early years to wisdom in the years of old age. And while the point is clear when we make it this way, it is not naturally visible to a boy who has to do a homework assignment when he can hear all the neighborhood kids playing kick the can.

The connections must be made for him. Boys must therefore learn to be *teachable*, *studious*, and *thoughtful*.

Glory-bearers: The last aspect of masculinity is seen in the fact that men are the glory of God. Paul puts the matter very plainly. “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man” (1 Cor. 11:7). The woman reflects the glory of God by reflecting the glory of man, whose glory she is. However much modern egalitarians do not like it, God did not make the world according to their specifications. The head of every man is Christ, and the head of every woman is man (1 Cor. 11:3). This teaching on headship is repeated by Paul elsewhere. “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing” (Eph. 5:23–24).

These distinctions are not made in the interests of winning a competition. Star differs from star in glory. The sun and the moon differ from one another. When the Bible assigns one kind of glory to man and another kind of glory to woman, our modern egalitarian bigotries prevent us from seeing that they are different kinds and levels of *glory*.

G.K. Chesterton wrote a short poem entitled “Comparisons” that summarizes the problem exactly.

If I set the sun beside the moon,
And if I set the land beside the sea,
And if I set the town beside the country,
And if I set the man beside the woman,
I suppose some fool would talk about one being better.

Because these things are true, boys must be instructed on how to grow up into glory and how to fulfill their responsibility to be *representative*, *responsible*, and *holy*.

Putting this together, we should have a pretty good sense of where we are going. We should want our boys to be aggressive and adventurous. They are learning to be lords of the earth. We should want them to be patient and hard-working. They are learning husbandry. We should want them to hate evil and to have a deep desire to fight it. They are learning what a weapon feels like in their hands. We should want boys to be eager to learn from the wise. They are learning to become wise themselves. We should want them to stand before God, in the worship of God, with head uncovered. They are the image and glory of God.