

Role of Men in the Church

Session One

Challenges to Men in our Society – Challenges to Men in the Church

“I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.”

Ezekiel 22:30 (all scripture quotes from the New International Version)

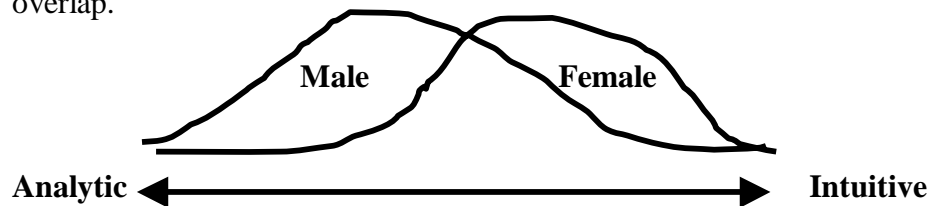
- I. Why convene a class on the role of men in the church?
 - A. Many suggest that a major (perhaps the major) challenge to the church as we enter the 20th century is the deficit in male spiritual leadership and specifically the deficit of men who desire to become spiritual leaders and spiritual workers.
 1. LaGard Smith’s book on the role of women in the church was entitled *Male Spiritual Leadership*.
 2. Evangelical leaders have focused upon the problem of male spiritual leadership (and the role of men in the church).
 - a. James Dobson and Focus on the Family.
 - b. Bill McCartney and Promise Keepers.
 - B. Men are often absent from Christian churches (they go to football games while women go to church though they are just as likely to say they believe in God). The absence of men is obvious despite the fact that leadership roles are dominated by men.
 - C. The relative absence of men from Christianity is not seen in most other faiths, especially Judaism and Islam.
 - D. Men may see Christianity as “effeminate”.
 - E. Women and men are both concerned. Some view the absence of men in our churches as a crisis, as great a crisis as the conflict over the role of women in the church.

II. Definitions.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27

- A. *Male and Female*. These terms are used to describe us biologically (we can look and know whether a person is biologically male or female). According to the sociologists, one’s “sex” is male or female. In this class, we will not refer to male and female except when we discuss biological differences.

1. The Hebrew word *zakar* in Genesis 1:27 basically means the biological male. The Greek word *aner* can mean the biological male (yet this is not the only meaning).
2. There are not only obvious anatomical differences between males and females, there are probably psychological (predominantly temperamental) differences as well.
 - a. Young males are more aggressive and competitive, females more cooperative.
 - b. Males are more analytic, females are more intuitive.
3. It must be remembered, however, that these temperamental characteristics overlap.



- B. *Men and Women.* These roles are assigned to us by society. When we are born, we are determined to be men or women (boys or girls). This, in turn determines how we dress, into which public restroom we go, etc. According to sociologists, gender includes the various factors we take into account as we classify people as men and women. In this class, we will use the terms men and women to indicate our assigned gender (I am a man, my wife is a woman). The Greek word *aner* can infer the role the biological man typically takes, such as that of husband (remember some of the debate regarding the role of women in the church focused on whether this word was translated husband or man).
- C. *Masculine and Feminine.* These terms are not used to classify persons but rather capture characteristics that we historically associate with men or women. For example, masculinity may be considered the possession of qualities such as bravery, adventuresomeness, stoicism, aggressiveness and steadfastness. In this class, we will use the terms masculine and feminine to describe characteristics (that is, feelings and behaviors) which have traditionally been assigned to men and women respectively. Yet it must be recognized that men have feminine characteristics and women have masculine characteristics. The Greek word *andrizomai* (which means full manhood) is used by Paul in I Cor. 16:13 which the NIV translates as “to stand firm in the faith”.
- D. There are predominant (though not universal) views of manhood from societies around the world. Some suggest that to be a man in most societies that man must *impregnate* women, *protect* dependents from danger and *provide* for kith and kin. These imperatives involve danger and competitiveness. Cultural concepts of manhood from anthropological studies include:

1. Manhood as achievement (acquisition of goods, power, influence). Man provides for his dependents.
 2. Manhood as hardiness and self-discipline (qualities necessary to meet the challenges of a hard and difficult world).
 3. Manhood as physical strength and a willingness as well as an ability to fight (as determined by, for example, prowess in athletic contests). Man protects his dependents from danger.
 4. Manhood as sexual conquest (the father of many children).
 5. Manhood as risk taking.
- E. These definitions are not hard and fast (for example, there is a very close connection between our ideas of gender and masculine/feminine). In addition, the roles have been limited because these characteristics are often considered exclusive to men and women. For example:
1. Women have been limited in the workplace and on the athletic field because of our assumptions about the biological capacity of the female. (Deborah joined Barak in Battle against Sisera in Judges 4.)
 2. Men have been discouraged from taking the responsibility to care for children or taking on many household responsibilities because males are thought incapable of such responsibilities. (Jesus encouraged the little children to come unto him in Mark 10:14.)

III. How should a class on the role of men in the church be taught?

- A. Our challenge when studying the role of women in the church was that we found a relative absence of scriptures focused upon the role of women in the early church. Our challenge when studying the role of men in the church is that we find even fewer scriptures specifically emphasizing the role of men compared to and contrasted with the role of women. Most passages which refer to men actually refer to both men and women. E.g. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." Titus 2:11 (The Greek word is *aner*.)
- B. There appear to be few restrictions on the activities of men in the church from a reading of the New Testament. Therefore in depth studies of specific scriptures (the approach taken in our study of the role of women in the church) will yield few new insights into the role of men in the church. There are a few exceptions. E.g. "Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance." Titus 2:2.
- C. The problem with the role of men in the church is that the church historically has found difficulty in attracting and retaining men as workers, except in the highest offices of the church. In other words, the church finds too few men who will assume a central role in the work of the church.
- D. A study of the role of men in the church must be based on a reexamination of the nature of the Christian life, specifically the masculine characteristics of that life, through study of Old Testament and New Testament characters as examples.

IV. Premises of the class.

We therefore begin this class from a very different perspective than we began the class on the role of women in the church. Rather than focus upon what is acceptable for men and women to do, we will focus upon masculine characteristics which have been neglected in the latter 20th century church. Though these characteristics may be relevant to both men and women at times, they have typically been associated with men. Though these characteristics should be developed by both men and women, they should be especially developed by men in the 21st century church. These characteristics include self discipline (II Peter 1:6), diligence in study (II Peter 1:5; Acts 17:11) as well as moral and spiritual leadership (Titus 1:9). I suggest the following premises as we begin this study

- A. The role of the Christian in the church includes both traditional masculine and feminine characteristics. Symbols such as soldier (Ephesians 6:10-18) and bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-24) abound in scripture. Jesus exhibited both masculine and feminine characteristics. None of us are exclusively masculine or feminine (though we are exclusively male and female).
- B. Today the problem faced by women in the church is qualitatively different than that faced by men. Whereas women struggle against, at times, false restrictions and barriers to their service of God, men struggle against a confusion of their masculine identity brought on by changing societal norms and changing norms in the church. These changing norms have been especially difficult for men who seek to live the Christian life. In recent years, the emphasis in Christian churches has been more on what historically has been associated with the feminine than the masculine. For example, the metaphor of the sinner returning to the peace and security (Matthew 11:28) of the arms of Christ's dominates the metaphor of the Christian as soldier doing battle for Christ (Ephesians 6). Both of these metaphors are scriptural and complement one another.
- C. The church is not attractive to many men in part because men frequently do not see a way within the church by which they can express their masculinity (to be real men). Playing tennis on Sunday morning rather than attending church is perhaps not just a recreational diversion but an expression of what it means to be a real man.
 - 1. This lack of attraction is far from universal, varies across Christian churches, and in no way detracts from the sacrificial work of many men in the church.
 - 2. Some traditional masculine characteristics are distinctly not Christian, such as pride in sexual conquest.
- D. The church has a tendency to emphasize the feminine (e.g., emotional expression and nurturance) rather than the masculine. This tendency is not new but has been present, according to some, since the Renaissance. Given societal confusion regarding the masculine and the feminine, the feminine

emphasis today may be especially difficult for men struggling with their sexual identity.

- E. The church will become more appealing to some men when the masculine characteristics of Christianity are recognized and emphasized. (Jesus emphasized the challenge of fishing when attracting his first apostles in Matthew 4:18-20.)
 - F. An emphasis upon masculine characteristics, however, may render the church less appealing to many others. “But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” Matthew 7:14
 - G. Men who are committed to Christ will find new avenues for leadership and service when these masculine characteristics are emphasized in our teachings. In other words, a masculine emphasis should strengthen the work of men in the church
 - H. A greater emphasis upon masculine characteristics does not conflict with the role of women in the church. “From him [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Ephesians 4:16
- V. Objectives for the class.
- A. To explore why men are less interested in Christianity and especially less interested in taking an active role in the church than women.
 - B. To determine masculine characteristics which the scriptures encourage Christians to develop as they grow in the faith.
 - C. To examine biblical characters who demonstrate these characteristics.
 - D. To identify why these characteristics are difficult to develop in the 21st century church among men.
 - E. To provide suggestions for the church so that these characteristics can be developed by our men.
- VI. Plan for the class.
- A. Identify a Christian characteristic which is typically considered masculine.
 - B. Review why that characteristic is difficult to develop in the world today.
 - C. Review why that characteristic is difficult to develop in the church today.
 - D. Explore reasons the development of these characteristics may be especially difficult for men.
 - E. Select a biblical character who exemplifies these characteristics and study selected aspects of that character’s life.
 - F. Develop a series of practical suggestions for the church and men in the church to develop these characteristics.

References

1. Gilmore DD: *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990.