

Boys to Men

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[0 : 00] So I'm about you to turn in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 1. Proverbs chapter 1.

And we're going to read Proverbs chapter 1 verses 8 to 19 and then in chapter 9 verses 1 to 6. And those will be on the screen if you don't have a Bible.

This is the Word of the Lord. Hear my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, come with us, let us lie in wait for blood.

Let us ambush the innocent without reason. Like she'll let us swallow them alive and hold, like those who go down to the pit.

We shall find all precious goods. We shall fill our homes with plunder. Throw in your lot among us.

We will all have one purse. My son, do not walk in the way with them.

[1 : 04] Hold back your foot from their paths. For their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird.

But these men lie in wait for their own blood. They set an ambush for their own lives. Such are the way of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain. It takes away the life of its possessor.

Then if you have a Bible, flip to Proverbs chapter nine. We'll read verses one to six. Wisdom has built her house.

She has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts. She has mixed her wine. She has also set her table. She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town.

Never as simple let him turn in here. To him who lacks sense, she says, come eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and live and walk in the way of insight.

[2 : 06] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God for his word. Let's pray together. O Lord and our God, we come tonight to pronounce you, Father, Spirit, Son, the God above God's, the Lord of lords, the King of kings.

We come to meet with you as our Creator and Redeemer. We come to have our hearts softened before Monday starts. We come to be reassured and comforted of the truth of the gospel.

So we ask, Lord, that you would come and meet with us as we look at this text. Because of Jesus Christ, we are confident, Lord, that you hear us when we ask you things. We ask, O Lord, tonight that you would bless the ministries of us as individuals as we step out into the world, into our workplaces.

We pray for Katrina as she does just these nine days that you would give her the moment to talk to somebody about the meaning of life and that their heart would be touched by the spirit of Christ himself to see the truth.

We ask, O Lord, that we would be people that ask the question above all else, what is true and seek to live according to the answer. And so we pray, Father, for our city and for our churches, for us in Cornerstone and Hesse Valley and Haddington, that we would be salt and light, that we would be agents of revival through the power of the Spirit in our city.

[3 : 45] And now we ask, O Lord, as we come to the text, Lord, that you would open our eyes to see in our hearts and minds and ears to hear the word of God. We ask this in Christ's name.

So the next two weeks, we are looking at the image of God in Proverbs, and we're not looking at the doctrine of the image of God, often called the Imago dei from Genesis chapter 1.

We're looking at the image of God. What's the image of God? The image of God is men and women.

Herman Boving, the Dutch theologian, hopefully says it this way. The human being does not merely bear or have the image of God, but he or she is the image of God.

And so the next two weeks, we're looking at the image of God, men and women. That's the image of God, male and female. And tonight we talk men. And the significant question of our time and of our culture is something like, is there an essence to maleness?

[5 : 00] Is there an essence to what it is to be a man? In other words, is there something that marks male identity above all else? Can you get at that?

What does it take to be a man? And the answer, the essence of manliness is complex.

But tonight, and we're starting just a bit late, so sorry for that, but in the next 30 minutes, we're going to clear away all the confusion and get to the utter complexity of manliness stated in just a few simple sentences.

No, we're not. We're not going to do that because I have 30 minutes. And biblical manhood is a huge topic. And there are treatises that are over 800 pages that I was looking at, not that I read them all this week, but looking at on biblical manhood, as it's often called.

But so our focus tonight is on proverbs and manhood, specific to proverbs. And the key difference, the key issue in proverbs about being a man is the difference that proverbs draws implicitly between boyhood and manhood.

[6 : 15] And the difference in boyhood and manhood in proverbs is not something that's according to age, but according to character. And it's described like this in chapter 9, the chapter we just read.

It's the difference in the way of simplicity and the way of insight is the way the writer describes it. In that passage, wisdom is being personified as a woman, and it says that she makes her table, she prepares a feast, and then it says that she sends out her young women.

Literally the word there is virgin. She sends out the virgins that are serving in her household to beckon the simple, to come to her house. And it says, come, simple ones, eat my bread, drink my wine that I have mixed, and leave your simple ways and live.

And what's happening there is metaphorically the way of wisdom versus the way, against the way of simplicity is being depicted as akin to the romantic chase.

In other words, lady wisdom is calling out to young men and saying, come here and eat from the table of wisdom, leave simplicity, leave boyhood behind.

[7 : 27] Come and get wisdom, get manhood. It's the transference from boyhood to manhood is getting wisdom, and that's the way the book depicts it. And as difficult as this may seem in our time and in today's culture, and we're not going to explore all the ins and outs of this and not even close tonight, but the Bible does give an objective, absolute way to realize what true manhood is.

And the answer to that is it's found in the man Jesus Christ. He was meek and he was lowly, he was strong and he was ferocious, and he was gentle, and he loved his bride all the way to the point of death.

And so tonight we're going to look at two things. First, to be a real man is to do crossfit. And secondly, to be a man is to rarely communicate.

No, I'm kidding. Of course. I mean there's an argument maybe, but two points.

We're going to look at men and women very briefly, and that's not the main point. And then we're going to look at secondly the main point, boyhood and manhood. So first, men and women. This is not the main point in the book of Proverbs, but I want to say that Proverbs as a book exists because of an assumption it makes with the rest of the Bible.

[8 : 53] And that's that there is a difference in gender between men and women, boys and girls. And the assumption is built in the fact that Proverbs is a book that's written to boys, not to girls specifically.

It's written, the book of Proverbs is written primarily to young men. And there are three attributed writers in the book of Proverbs, if you've caught that. Solomon, a guy named Agur, and a guy named King Lemuel.

And we don't know who the last two are historically. But these are three men writing to boys, but the star of Proverbs is four women.

And the four women, the most important characters in the book of Proverbs are two pairs of contrasts, metaphors, lady wisdom and lady folly on the one hand.

And then on the other hand, the most famous, the noble woman of Proverbs 31 and the forbidden woman that Neal talked about a lot last week.

[10 : 01] And so this is three men talking to a bunch of boys about four women, to put it simply. It's a book, it's a book written for boys and it's time.

And this is, that doesn't mean that it's message exclusively for boys, not at all. It opens up to everyone. But its audience is primarily young men. You see this in the very first verse we read tonight, chapter one verse eight.

Hear my son, do not forsake my teaching. And the constant voice is the father speaking to the son. 724, listen to me, O sons.

And that is constant throughout the entire book. And there is a vast body of scholarship on wisdom literature that says that most of the time in the ancient Aries, the time of the Old Testament, that wisdom literature was often delivered to boys and to girls with different texts, with different emphases and different insights.

And a lot of Hebrew scholars think that the song of songs in our Bible, the song of Solomon, it's often called, was written specifically for girls navigating the problems that they have with men in that ancient Ariesian world.

[11:13] And there were many problems with the way men treated women in the ancient Aries. And so a lot of scholars think that. But the important thing to say is this, that the assumption at the outset of the existence of the book of Proverbs with the rest of the Bible is that gender differences are real, that gender differences do correspond to being born male and female, and that gender doesn't exist on a compendium or spectrum of possibility.

But as soon as you start to express that gender difference or what exactly that difference is in detail, we always either over-express it or under-express it.

One of us has a tendency to either over-express it or under-express it. And one of the famous examples of that is the book that was a New York Times bestseller in the 90s, John Gray's Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus.

That book was poking fun at gender differences, stereotypical gender differences, but it was also trying to, in its own way, offer solutions to the deep animosity that John Gray noticed developing in late modern culture between genders, between men and women.

And this is what he said about the differences between men and women. John Gray, men and women differ in all areas of their lives.

[12:45] Not only do men and women communicate differently, but they think, feel, perceive, act, love, need, and appreciate completely differently. They almost seem to be from different planets, seeking different loves, needing different nourishment.

One difference, he writes, women talk and openly communicate. Men go to caves in order to solve their problems their own way.

And then he argues in another place very briefly, women seek love, men seek power. Now this is one of the great examples of over-expression of a social construct that's false because everything that he described there is not essential to what it means to be male or female, and merely a stereotype, a construct that's been placed upon men and women by a culture.

And the point I just want to make in this first point very briefly is that Christianity, I think unlike any other worldview, offers deep resources and explanatory power for understanding gender that speaks into today's problems.

And this is best expressed in me going scientific for just a second, kind of. Also just stick with me for two minutes on this. There are two prevailing views about the way gender has developed at the time that John Gray wrote that book that still dominate today.

[14:18] There was a recent article in Atlantic expressing the two views, but for the second time I'm not going to quote it. The first view is the environmental view that developed in the mid-20th century.

It's also known as the biosocial view of gender. And it says that gender differences between men and women or boys and girls especially are completely, entirely social constructs that they're created by the environment that we raise our children in.

And they're completely dependent only on social expectation. And that means in the environmental view that the culture creates these differences and that's a problem.

And the only real solution to that problem is to seek either a genderlessness society, which was something people talked about in the mid-20th century, or a society that has a multiplicity, a huge spectrum of gender that dissociates us from any binaries.

And so that's the environmental view, that gender is completely socially constructed. But immediately and especially in the 90s, there was a big reaction in the scholarly world to that view.

[15 : 28] And the reaction was largely from natural scientists and social scientists that said that that view is discredited if you study the animal kingdom and humans themselves and what developed in response was what's often called the evolutionary view.

And after this we'll be done with views. So just almost done with this. Laura Bloom is famous for this, she wrote a book in the 90s called *Sex on the Brain*, where she said that across all animal species and humans, gender differences are real, they're universal, but they're developed as survival mechanisms across time.

So that patriarchy is a survival mechanism and nurturing also is a survival mechanism. And now they're deeply wired into the brain and for her as well, this is a problem and the only way to overcome it is to subvert the evolutionary process and try to change it to overcome this.

So they both seek the same outcome. And I'm being incredibly minimalistic here because we don't have much time, but I just want to say the Bible is different.

The Bible is different from both of these views. The Bible's logic gives it an immense explanatory power because it says two things, one that gender differences are created by God, that human beings are created male and female, and that gender differences are distorted by sin.

[17 : 06] And what that means on the one hand is that the Bible says that gender differences are not mere social constructions, that they're real, but on the other hand because of sin, there are plenty of harmful social constructions regarding gender differences.

And it's really only the Christian worldview that has the power to say both of those things. Only Christianity can explain the universality of difference and the universality of dignity and equality and the reality of harmful social constructs regarding gender because we have a doctrine of creation in Genesis 1 and a doctrine of sin in Genesis 3.

And it's those two doctrines that a human being needs to explain reality. And Proverbs, to close this point, is assuming this reality.

It's built into the basis of the book. It's a book written to boys about relating largely to women in their lives and how to do that well and good and righteously.

And let me just say lastly that Christians, because this is the biblical logic, Christians above all other people have to understand that since the fall, the sin of gender animosity has been rampant.

[18 : 28] The sin where men often think I would be better off without women and women often think we would be better off without men. And we don't really think that, but we speak that way sometimes.

And that sin can be defined like this. Gender animosity is supposing that one gender is more the image of God than the other.

And that's a sin, and that's something that Christians above all people in our culture have to fight. So that's at the back of wisdom literature in the Bible.

And that's point one. Point two, and we only have two points. The main point in Proverbs, boyhood and manhood, the culture I grew up in, bought into John Gray's picture of over expressed gender differences in the Southern U.S.

There was indeed a very clear essential masculinity to be a young man in the place that I grew up. And it was a social construct undoubtedly, but the one way to express it, it's been often expressed this way, is by using the three B's.

[19 : 44] What's a man, where I came from at least? A man, to be a man, you must, three B's, the ball field, the billfold, and the bedroom.

The ball field, the billfold, and the bedroom. That's the three things you have to be a part of. First the ball field. How do you perform on the field on Friday night?

That means American football and translation. And that's essential to who you are, to be a man, where I come from. The billfold, that's a metaphor for saying, are you successful at your endeavors?

So if it's school, do you do well, do you defeat the competition? If you're at work, do you make money, do you defeat the competition? And then thirdly, the bedroom, which is a crude way of saying, can you get girls to go out with you?

And those are the three ways that masculinity was primarily expressed in the culture that I grew up in. And that's called hypermasculinity. I had a tough time this week trying to think of a way to categorize the social construction of masculinity in this culture, actually.

[20 : 57] I think it's much more complex here, and not quite like that in totality. But that's hypermasculinity. That's one social construct of what it means to be a man.

It's where male identity is associated primarily with performance, with success, to be a man is to be successful in all these domains. And so are you man enough?

That's the question of a recent book by Dan Pyle, a pastor. Are you man enough? And Proverbs tonight is saying that approach is the way of simplicity.

That's the simple-minded way. It's reducing masculine identity to performance, and it's not the way of wisdom or insight. And so in Proverbs 9, the pastors we read, Lady Wisdom beckons young men the simple, come and turn in here, drink my wine, eat my bread, the bread of understanding of what it means to grow up and to be a man.

And that means that seeking manliness in the book of Proverbs is metaphorically expressed as the quest for seeking godly character.

[22 : 08] Essential manliness in the book of Proverbs is this, men seek to have godly character. And there are a few recurring themes of what that means in the book of Proverbs, but they're actually really nicely paralleled in the passage we read from Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 3.

The list, what it looks like to be a godly man, and this is the list of what you have to have to be an elder, but it's not saying that everybody needs to pursue being a pastor. That would be against the very worldview that we preach.

But it is expressing the traits of a godly man, and this is what Paul says. Men are above reproach, the husband of one wife if they are married, which is not essential to manliness.

Overminded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, not drunkards, not violent, but gentle, not lovers of money.

In the book of Proverbs, I just want to briefly here say that there's one clear message that is throughout the entire book about the transference from boyhood to manhood, and it's expressed in chapter 1 enigmatically in verses 17 and 18.

[23 : 26] When the author says this in 18, men do not set an ambush for their own lives. Men do not ambush their own lives, or in verse 17, men do not lie in wait for their own blood.

Now what in the world does that mean? If you look at chapter 1 verse 8, the very first verse we read, here my son, your father's instruction.

So this is a father talking to a son, and then the climax or the explanation of what he says is his principal instruction is found in verse 10, and this is what he said, my son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.

Now literally, you could translate that passage a little differently, and if you had a very literal translation of it, it would say this, if sinfulness tries to make you foolish, don't give it control of your desires.

If sinfulness, young men, tries to make you into a fool, don't let it take over your desires. And so what that means is that the rest of this passage is a metaphor where the father is saying to the son, when people who are evil come and try to get you to do bad things with them, it's the same thing as when you let your evil desires control your actions.

[24 : 57] If sinfulness tries to make you into a fool, don't give it control of all of your desires. And so when it says, men do not set an ambush to their own lives, this is what it means.

If you do what you want all the time, then you will kill yourself. That's the difference in boys and men.

Men know that if you do as a man what you want to do all the time, you will kill yourself. You will go down the path of destruction, the evil way.

And so that means that the development and proverbs from boyhood to manhood is essentially described according to the virtue of self-control. Self-control.

And Paul talks about self-control as the final of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5 23. It's listed at the very middle of the qualifications for elder in 1 Timothy 3 and the clearest proverb and the whole book of proverbs that's directed precisely to men says this in chapter 25, a man without self-control is a city who has been broken into and plundered and left without walls.

[26 : 16] A man who does not have self-control is a city who has been broken into and plundered. In other words, if you men cannot control what Augustine calls a long time ago, disordered loves or disordered desires, then that means you leave yourself to become exactly what you want to become.

And that's disordered. You are like a city without any safeguards without self-control and you will be plundered. And we've seen this throughout the whole of our series in the book of proverbs.

A lack of self-control allows broken desires to dominate in your work life. You become without self-control slothful or addicted to too much work in your life of speech and the way you speak. You have no ability to control the desires expressed from your heart from your tongue. You have trouble controlling your addictions to drink or to anger and rage.

If you don't have self-control, you can't control your romantic desires, the erotic desires that Neil was talking about last week. And so I think the essential point, the difference in boyhood and manhood in the book of Proverbs is men get self-control.

[27 : 43] And we'll just close briefly with two things. How? How do you get it? And there are two things, I had four but I'm only going to give two.

Two things, godly men know that they have needs and godly men must become athletes.

Just stick with me on that one. Godly men know they have needs. If you want to get self-control in the book of Proverbs, you have to know that you have a disordered self.

As men, you have to know that your desires, your loves are disordered. That just because you desire something doesn't make it good.

And hypermasculinity says, I have everything I need inside of me and all I need to do is compete to reach my potential. But masculinity in Proverbs says, men first have to learn that they have broken desires.

[28 : 50] In other words, men have to know that they don't perfectly image God as his image in this world. And that means you need reconciliation.

The first thing a godly man knows is that he needs reconciliation with God. And we expressed this in our earlier sermon in chapter 1 verse 7. This is called getting the fear of the Lord.

Getting the fear of the Lord means having a relationship with God. That's all. And men, you can never be your true personality without the fear of the Lord, without a relationship with God.

And the only way to be reconciled to God, to have a relationship with God and not his enemy is through the man himself, the man.

The man of power. Jesus Christ. The man of power who loved his bride by dying for her. And that means that the command of the gospel for men tonight and always is repent and believe.

[30 : 03] And what we're talking about here is not just once. I want to ask you, if you're a married man or if you're a man that has a girlfriend that you've been dating maybe for a while, or if not, either of those in terms of a broader relationship you have with a family member or a best friend, if someone went to your wife or your girlfriend or your family or your best friend and said, is that a man of repentance, what would they say?

And the point is that repentance is not just for one time. married men are repenting men. Jesus is the greatest man that ever lived.

That's easy to say. Paul maybe was second. I don't know, but maybe. And in 1 Timothy chapter one, Paul says, Jesus Christ came to save sinners.

And then he said, Paul says, and I am the chief amongst them. And you got to know that Paul wrote the book of 1 Timothy when he was a very, very old man. He was very old.

And Paul was manlier and godlier and walked more righteously than any of us men in here do or ever will. And one of his last statements was, I am the chief of sinners.

[31 : 20] He was a man who knew that repentance was for all of life. 500 years ago, in two months from a couple weeks from now, Martin Luther started the Reformation by nailing the 95 theses on the door of the castle in Wittenberg.

And the very first thesis he put on that door was this, our Lord and Jesus Christ, when he said repent, he meant that the whole of the Christian life from first to last must be one of repentance.

And so the primary thing tonight that a respectable godly man needs to know is that they need to be saved from themselves.

Today you need repentance and forgiveness in the gospel. And secondly and finally, and we'll close, godly men that want self-control have to become athletes.

You have to become an athlete if you want to be a godly man that gets self-control. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, Paul likens the walk of the Christian life to race to athletes.

[32 : 39] And he says this, do you not know all of you, and you all know this, he's talking directly to us, do you not know that in a race runners compete but only one of them wins and gets a prize,

right?

So you need to run that you obtain the prize, he says. And we all know that every athlete, he says, exercises self-control in order to compete.

They do it for a temporary perishable wreath or prize. But we compete for an imperishable prize. So I discipline my body, my soma daily and I keep it under control.

And what Paul is saying there metaphorically is that a successful athlete, everybody knows this, a successful athlete that's going to win, that's going to win at the Olympics, exercises self-control, right?

They only eat certain things, they only drink certain things, they sleep on a very regimented schedule, they do crossfit, they have a very tight schedule that's self-controlled, right?

[33 : 51] Everybody knows that. And it's hard to do that. And sometimes it's miserable to never eat what you want to eat.

And the thing Paul is saying here to us is why? Why does an athlete do that to themselves? And this is what he says, the secret to self-control, that for the athlete it's to get the crown.

They do it for the crown. The wreath or the prize literally here, the prize of victory. And it's good to be an athlete. And it's good as a man to be an athlete.

I agree with that. Yes, indeed. But it's not essential. Godly men must become athletes of a higher order. And here's the secret to self-control.

Desiring a greater prize than your disordered desires can give you. Desiring a better prize.

[34 : 52] And Chalmers put it this way and we'll close with this and it's cliché. Thomas Chalmers, our father in the free church, but sometimes cliché things are worth saying and that's how they became cliché.

In the explosive power of the new affection, how does a man displace in his heart the desires of the world? By seeing the glory of God in the face of the man Jesus Christ as a more worthy prize.

So that the heart does no longer resign to the old affections, the old desires, but exchanges that old desire for a new and a better hope.

Let's pray. Father, we ask, Lord, that you would help us as men to become self-controlled over our desires which are difficult to control in the world of sin.

And so we ask that we would be given a heart that prizes Jesus Christ as our crown above the temporary things that our earthly desires can give us.

[36 : 06] And we pray that you would make us holy men who love well, who are gentle and strong. And we pray for this in Christ's name.