

PERSPECTIVE

JANUARY 2025

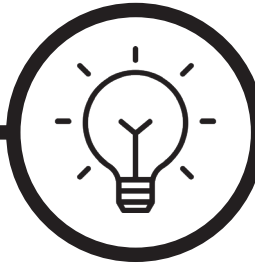


MANHOOD, WOMANHOOD, & THE LOCAL CHURCH

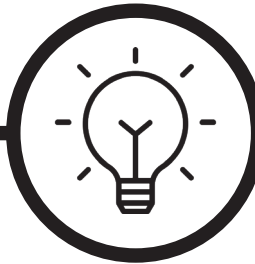
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Aaron Menikoff



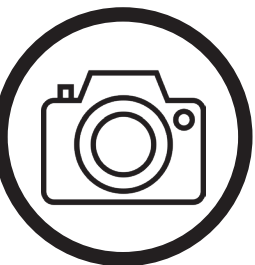
BOOK HIGHLIGHT 5
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January



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Manhood, Womanhood, and the Local Church

Is there a cultural topic more divisive today than manhood and womanhood? I doubt it. You can disagree with your neighbor about policies toward the Ukraine. You can debate with your family about immigration reform. These conversations may become heated, but nothing is as contentious as sitting down with a co-worker who denies the category of “sex” as an objective reality.

A WORD ON DEFINITIONS

Our “sex” matters. Why do I keep using the word *sex*? Because this is the clearest word to describe the fact that each of us is born with a certain sex—and there are only two options: male or female. The Oxford dictionary online defined sex as “either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans and most other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions.” In other words, sex is a physical reality. It is a permanent reality. There is a fixed-ness to our sex.

Increasingly, people use the word “gender” to imply our sex is not fixed. The Merriam-Webster dictionary online defines it this way: “the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex.” One could drive a semi-truck through that definition. Given this understanding, how one lives out being “male” or “female” is simply a product of your upbringing, your culture, or your own psyche. If this is true, gender is as fluid as water spilling every which way on the counter. No wonder a number of young people today claim to have “gender dysphoria.” They are frustrated that how they feel about their sexuality does not match their birth certificate. They begin to think their gender is different than their sex.

I’m not opposed to the word “gender.” My gender is male. But it is the same thing as saying my sex is male. I am a man, and my sex (and gender) has implications for how I am to think and act and relate to others. In a fallen world, given my sinfulness, I will struggle to do this well. But struggle I must because the sex God gave me is one way God intends me to bring him glory. When the word “gender” is used improperly, it can imply how we live out our sexuality has nothing to do with our sex. But that’s not true. Men should be masculine. Women should be feminine. It won’t do to say, “my sex is male but my gender, female.” Driving a wedge between sex and gender only muddies the water.

On this point, I agree with pastor John Piper who wrote years ago: “in contemporary usage ‘gender’ refers to what we are by social conditioning and ‘sex’ refers to what we are by nature, and the shift in focus from sex to gender more and more assumes that maleness and femaleness, at the root level of personhood, are negligible realities.” He penned those words in 1999, and they have tragically proven to be quite true.

THE GOD-GIVENNESS OF OUR SEX

Our sex—the reality of our maleness or femaleness—is a biological and God-given reality. It’s important to acknowledge that some babies are born with atypical or ambiguous genitalia—roughly .018 percent. This is a heart-wrenching reality and parents need great wisdom to know how to proceed. But this condition is extremely rare. The vast, vast majority of children are born with a single sex—male or female. This is how God designed us, and he did it for a reason.

In the very first chapter of Scripture, we are told that one way we image God is through our sex: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). Thus, one way we bear God’s image is through the sex God gave us. This is a hard idea to grasp, but an important one. It may be best understood by remembering God is three in one; the Father, Son, and Spirit have eternally existed in fellowship with each other.

To be made in God’s image is to be made with the capacity for fellowship too. Theologian Anthony Hoekema made the sound observation that humans are, by nature, social beings and this is part of being made in the *imago Dei*, the image of God. Just as God exists in fellowship—three in one and one in three—so we have the capacity for fellowship too. In fact, “man needs the companionship of woman.” This does not mean that every man or woman needs to be married and have children, but if none of us do, humanity ceases to exist. Our very biology—how God made us—is evidence we were made for communion. Ultimately, communion with God but also communion with one another.

Sometimes, people stumble over Galatians 3:28 where Paul writes, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ.” They wonder if Paul is saying that our sex no longer matters. Not at all! Paul is making the important argument that men and women can equally enter into fellowship with God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul does not mean that when one becomes a Christian, he ceases to be a Jew or a slave or a male. Paul

does mean that faith in Christ is for the slave and the free, men and women, Jews and Gentiles. The gospel, in that sense, is for all. In cultures that valued the free more than the slave, men more than women, and even Jews more than Gentiles, this would have been a radical idea indeed.

I know it's a strange proposition to assert in the twenty-first century, but our sex is a gift from God to be embraced regardless of how we feel. Disorder and frustration ensue when men try to live feminine lives or when women try to live masculine lives. God intends each of us to live out the sex he gave us. Men and women are different and these differences are to be celebrated. Pastor Kevin DeYoung put it well: "Men and women are not interchangeable. The man and the woman—in marriage especially, but in the rest of life as well—complement each other, meaning they are supposed to function according to a divine fittedness."

Unfortunately, what is divinely "fitted" doesn't always fit.

BEING HONEST

One of the reasons conversations about manhood and womanhood can be so controversial is because many of our neighbors—many of us even—struggle to feel comfortable in the body God gave us. There are a myriad of reasons this could be the case.

If masculinity is fundamentally about playing football, shooting game, and being sexually promiscuous, a young man who never dates, enjoys opera, and would rather spend a day reading a book than sitting in a deer stand might be tempted to question his gender. In other words, when society is given the power to entirely define masculinity, men who fall short could be led—however sinfully—to wonder if God made a mistake. On the flip side of the coin, a young woman who is more comfortable bantering with the guys than talking nails with the girls, who is drawn to t-shirts and jeans over dresses and heels, and who is delighted at the thought of a long career without a husband—that young woman might be tempted to question her gender too.

Clementine Breen experienced sexual abuse as a child, and this abuse led her to question whether she wanted to mature into a fully-grown woman. She claimed she wanted to be a boy. Instead of assuring her that God made her just right, her parents sent Clementine to the Center for Transyouth Health and Development at Children's Hospital in Los Angeles. The "experts" decided Clementine's gender did not fit her sex. With the consent of her parents (the experts warned them that Clementine might commit suicide if they questioned her

conclusion), doctors gave her puberty blockers, hormones, and ultimately removed both breasts, when she was just fourteen years old. Now, 20, Clementine is old enough to know better and is suing her doctors and hospitals. The case has made it to the Supreme Court.

A young man might be uncomfortable with a woman or on the gridiron. He may even have the fleeting thought life would be easier if God had made him a woman. A young woman may feel shaky in heels or embarrassed to have breasts. In a moment of weakness, she too may wish God had made her a different sex. The answer is not to play God and try to redo the infrastructure we were born with. The answer is to trust God and live out the sex he gave us.

But if we are being honest, and we must be honest, this is easier for some than for others. Christians unwilling to engage in this topic with charity and compassion should probably not engage at all.

THE YEAR OF BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD

Every year at Mount Vernon, we pick a theme or a topic to explore deeply together. Last year, we studied work and leisure. Through Wednesday night talks, Sunday school lessons, a couple of sermons, and even Perspective articles like this, we sought to wrap our mind around the fact that God has given us both work and rest. We asked and answered several questions, and I pray those studies served you well in whatever vocation God has placed you.

This year, the topic is manhood and womanhood. The elders chose this theme not because we are eager to enter the culture war—we aren't! But because we are eager to teach what the Bible says about male and female and about masculinity and femininity.

Shining a biblical light on this topic is important because the culture—which is where we live 24/7—tends to get it wrong in a couple key areas I've already visited. First, the culture can promote a type of masculinity and femininity that leaves many feeling like they fall short.

As a kid, the Marlboro Man represented the height of virility and machismo. He was a "man's man." Who is today's public representative of masculinity? Survivalist Bear Grylls? Racer Travis Pastrana? Podcaster Joe Rogan? How many young women aspire to be as influential as Taylor Swift, as strong as Zendaya, or as accomplished as Hillary Clinton? Unless the church does its job, the culture will define masculinity and femininity for the next generation.

Second, the culture has acquiesced to the feelings of adolescents uncomfortable with their own bodies and eager to escape. Whatever you may think about the legalization of same-sex marriage, it has left children with the assumption that whom they marry is a thing indifferent. It promotes the idea that men and women really are interchangeable. Downstream from this social change is the gender-reassignment movement that catastrophically changed the life of young Clementine Breen.

It is incumbent upon churches to rightly divide the Word of Truth, and this includes what the Word of God says about male and female, masculinity and femininity. We need the Bible because, living in a fallen world, the human heart will regularly struggle to get this right. This has always been the case.

Embracing the Sex God Gave You—From Moses to Paul Standing on the edge of the Promised Land, instructing Israel how to be the people of God in their new home, Moses called them to recover a biblical, sexual ethic. Though many examples of this kind of instruction could be cited, Deuteronomy 22:5 warrants our attention: “A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does those things is an abomination to the LORD your God.”

Why did Moses give this command? Because it was a live issue! Coming out of Egypt, exposed to the customs of foreign nations, Israelites had been tempted to follow the rituals of their neighbors. Apparently, these customs included erasing the differences between male and female.

What are we to make of a command like this? Let’s begin by affirming we are not under law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14). That is to say, the Old Testament laws don’t apply to Christians today the way they applied to the Jewish people under the Old Covenant before Christ came. This means my wife, Deana, can borrow my coat without warranting the wrath of God!

We know that Jesus came to fulfill the law (Matt. 5:17). He perfectly obeyed each commandment, and he bore the wrath of God for those who didn’t. It’s not just that Jesus, a Jewish male, never wore a woman’s cloak—though this is undoubtedly true! It is that Jesus lived a holy life in full embrace of his masculinity. What did this look like? He provided for the women in his life. Consider the way he shepherded his mother before he died (John 19:26–27) or how he shepherded the woman at the well, calling her to repent of her sins and trust in God (John 4). Jesus shepherded his own heart, too, by resisting the temptation

to put the desires of his flesh above the commands of God (Matt. 4:1–11).

In other words, Jesus fulfilled Deuteronomy 22:5 not merely by not dressing up as a woman. No, he fulfilled the law by living out the sex with which he was born. Jesus was a man who embraced his masculinity for the glory of his Father who sent him.

Whether you are male or female, one way you follow Christ is by embracing the sex God gave you. For men and women—single or married—this means, like Jesus, putting the commands of God above the desires of your flesh and living in sexual purity. For married men, this means lovingly shepherding your wife and kids—providing materially and spiritually for their needs. For married women, this means lovingly following your husband in submission first to Christ but also to him.

When Moses told the people of Israel to live out their gender, he was reaching into the very headwaters of the Bible. Our sex is one way we bear God’s image, and this reality is for our good and for the glory of the God who made us.

This explains why, as New Covenant Christians, we are going to be eager to embrace biblical masculinity and femininity. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul commands Christian men and women to dress appropriately—women covering their heads, men keeping their hair short. Not because (I believe) these specific instructions are everlasting commands, but because every generation of Christians is called to live out the sex God assigned us at birth. In first-century Corinth, a woman with an uncovered head was being immodest. A man with long hair looked like a woman. Paul’s message in this chapter is about authority, but it is also about how women and men live out their sex. Though customs change, the principles remain the same. Christian men and women of every generation are to look and act like Christian men and women, respectively.

IT’S ALL IN THE FINE PRINT

As we embark on this year thinking about biblical manhood and womanhood, tons of questions are going to arise.

- Is it okay for my daughter to play with trucks or my son with dolls?
- How can women faithfully serve in a male-led church?
- How should biblical views of manhood shape how men and women think of working outside the home?

- What does it look like for me to engage with my LGBTQ-affirming friend? And what about pronouns?!
- How should biblical manhood and womanhood shape my approach to dating?

These are important questions and, Lord willing, we'll get to them in the weeks and months ahead. Keeping Romans 14–15 in mind, we don't want Mount Vernon to be a place where we "quarrel over opinions" (Rom. 14:1). Godly Christians can disagree over how, exactly, to execute the principles of manhood and womanhood we find in the pages of Scripture. Nonetheless, we all want to be as mature as we can be. Maybe our views about how to live out being male and female need to be reformed by Scripture. We should all be open to that!

A BRIEF WORD ABOUT FEMINISM

In her book, *God's Good Design*, Claire Smith describes feminism as "the cultural air we breathe" today. As we think about biblical manhood and womanhood, we need to realize that feminism is a problem. It's not all bad. The first wave of feminism led to women having the right to vote. The second wave, though, was about more than equal pay or dignified treatment in the workplace; it led to women looking down upon the value of being a stay-at-home mother. The third wave, at its worst, has sought to rid the culture of male and female entirely. This is where we are living now.

We would be foolish to think the church is impervious to the influence of feminists. Second wave feminism has undoubtedly led some men to be overly passive and unwilling to lead their wives just as it has led some women to denigrate the value of staying home and raising their kids. The fundamental issue is not that women must work only at home. The fundamental issue is that feminists sought to catechize an entire generation of women into thinking that being a stay-at-home mom is a futile and disappointing existence. This is a lie from hell.

The bad fruit of feminism needs to be handled wisely, humbly, and with the sensitivity that some of us have, whether we know it or not, built our lives on a foundation sprinkled with feminist assumptions. Addressing feminism is going to be a key part of presenting a biblical view of manhood and womanhood. There are times, by God's grace, when the culture "gets it right" and good comes—the right to vote or desegregation are examples. We should be thankful when we see society walking in step with biblical principles. Nonetheless, we don't want

to take our cues from the culture; we aim to be shaped by the Bible.

CONCLUSION

Biblical manhood and womanhood is not the most important aspect of our church. It is the gospel that does and must hold center stage. If we are a people of the Book, we will be a people of the gospel. However, let us never forget that biblical manhood and womanhood cannot be separated from the gospel.

After all, as Ephesians 5 lays out so clearly, the church is presented to us as a bride being prepared for her husband. Christ is the husband to the bride. Christ protects and shepherds and preserves and provides for his bride just as a faithful husband is to do for his bride. Over the next few months, as we look deeper into biblical manhood and womanhood, we will be looking more deeply at the gospel itself and the greatest mystery of all, that Jesus Christ laid down his life for his church—the most masculine and glorious act in all of human history.

— Aaron Menikoff

¹John Piper, *Sexual Complementarity: The Pursuit of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Desiring God Ministries, 1999), 5.

²Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 14.

³Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 14.

⁴Editorial Board, "The Double-Mastectomy Lawsuit," WSJ Online (13 December 2024).

⁵The book to read is Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader at Home* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

⁶The book to read is Carolyn Mahaney, *Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

⁷Claire Smith, *God's Good Design: What the Bible Really Says About Men and Women* (Australia: Matthias Media, 2012), 12.

50 Crucial Questions

An Overview of Central Concerns about Manhood and Womanhood

Written by John Piper & Wayne Grudem

From the first light of creation, God designed men and women with distinct, specific, and complementary roles. After the fall, sin confused this divine design, and humanity has struggled with gender ever since. Christians throughout the centuries have battled this confusion by applying Scripture to each “new” interpretation our culture offers.

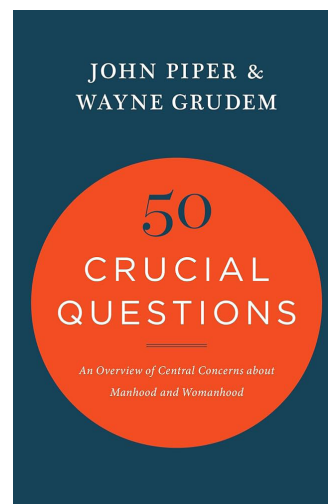
John Piper and Wayne Grudem offer a succinct yet clear presentation of Biblical masculinity and femininity in their short book, *50 Crucial Questions: An Overview of Central Concerns about Manhood and Womanhood*. Published in 2016, this book is really a Cliff Notes version of the 1991 book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, which the authors reference throughout. The book aims to promote the “beautiful reality of complementary differentiation” by responding to common objections. It covers a wide range of topics from female pastors to homosexuality to whether we should even talk about gender roles at all. Each answer contains numerous scriptural references to support the authors’ arguments.

I felt the sections that dealt with Scripture references commonly misinterpreted in support of egalitarianism were the book’s strongest. For instance, they explain that Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:28 (“there is no male or female...”) emphasizes believers’ “unity in Christ, not their sameness” (question 26). They even graciously address how cultural bias may influence Scriptural interpretation, particularly in the area of gender, but note that its presence does not prevent the careful exegesis of Scripture on this topic (question 42).

This book is an excellent resource for those struggling with understanding biblical gender roles or as a primer for someone desiring to better articulate what Gospel-centered complementarianism means. The Q&A format of the book may make it especially palatable to Christian or non-Christian egalitarians honestly seeking to address their concerns. Notably, this book does not mention or address transgenderism, but many of the answers could be extended to apply to that issue as well. Through pithy and pointed answers, Piper and Grudem provide an easy-to-consume, well-articulated, and helpful reference worth reading.

— Recommended by Jake Darlington

Available for checkout from the Church Library or purchase in the Bookstall



Excerpts from the Book

1

[L]eadership consists mainly in taking responsibility to establish a pattern of interaction that honors both husband and wife (and children) as a store of varied wisdom for family life.

– Question 8, p. 23

2

Thus, authority in general is the right, power, and responsibility to direct others. But the form and balance of these elements will vary in the different relationships of life according to the teachings of Scripture.

– Question 36, p. 57

3

[W]e would say that the issues of infant versus believer’s baptism, of premillennialism, and of presbyterian, congregational, or episcopal polity are less threatening to the health and mission of the church than questions of gender roles.

– Question 50, p. 82

The New Reformation Catechism on Gender and Sexuality

Written by Christopher J. Gordon

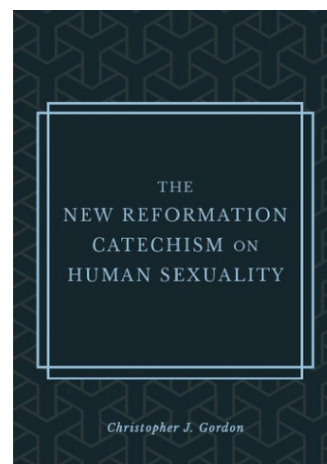
The New Reformation Catechism on Human Sexuality by Christopher J. Gordon is a booklet in a question-and-answer format addressing a subject the church very much needs clarity on today. Gordon wrote this catechism to provide God's people with a resource that will help train our minds to think biblically about human sexuality. This includes subtopics such as homosexuality, transgenderism, marriage, sexual desires, etc. Many Christian books discuss these topics in detail, and we thank God for providing those resources! What makes Gordon's book uniquely profitable, however, is that the format takes this wide array of topics under the umbrella of "human sexuality" and condenses it. Those who read it will get a broad but concise overview of how the Bible answers pressing questions about human sexuality.

I truly enjoyed Gordon's organization of the questions and answers in order of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. He is intentional to lead our hearts from a place of sorrow in seeing how we have fallen short of God's plan to seeing the hope that comes with how He has redeemed His people and our response as followers of Christ. On page 11, for example, he asks, "Question: Why is it comforting that we have a new identity in Jesus Christ? Answer: ...He also watches over me in such a way that He might free me from all sexual impurity as the temple of His indwelling; in fact, all things must work together to remake me into the image of His Son." Such profound encouragement to share with those who are struggling with sexual sin or have placed their identity in their sexuality: Run to the cross! Your creator has committed to remake you, the place of His indwelling, into the image of Christ, so beautiful and pure!

As a mom of little ones, it is not lost on me that my children will ask me questions regarding the subject of human sexuality. This book is a short but extremely informative read for busy parents, perhaps even as a devotional to go through with teenagers. It is also wonderful for new believers! When it comes to sexuality, confusion abounds in our world, and God's truth on the matter is sometimes hard to find, even among professing Christians. All believers will encounter complicated situations requiring a firm understanding of biblical principles. This catechism offers that. In the foreword of this booklet, written by Rosaria Butterfield, she ends with this: "May God bless you richly as you grow in Christian liberty. May this catechism help you hold fast to the truth and better understand how the full counsel of God speaks to the godly priority of human sexuality." This prayer was surely answered in my own heart—highly recommended!

— Recommended by Liya Agyekum

Available for checkout from the Church Library or purchase in the Bookstall



Excerpts from the Book

1

Q: Does God permit us to change our sex?

A: ...Therefore, we should not change our sex since God promises to glorify our bodies, in everlasting happiness, as He created us male and female, in the final resurrection.

– Part 1: Creation, p. 14

2

Q: But isn't there a difference between temptation and the practice of evil desires?"

A: Temptation becomes sin when we entertain and welcome the sinful desires of our hearts and act upon them.

– Part 2: Fall, p. 19

3

Q: Since we have been delivered from all sexual sin, why should we pursue a life of sexual purity?"

A: ...Fifth, as we battle against our sinful nature, the Holy Spirit strengthens our Christian walk and we give glory to God.

– Part 4: Restoration, p. 25

JANUARY

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

| | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| January 1 | Exodus 2:11–25 | January 17 | Leviticus 9:1–7 |
| January 2 | Exodus 3:1–12 | January 18 | Leviticus 9:8–24 |
| January 3 | Revelation 1:9–19 | January 19 | Romans 15:15–16 |
| January 4 | John 8:39–59 | January 20 | Romans 15:17–21 |
| January 5 | Exodus 3:13–22 | January 21 | Colossians 3:1–17 |
| January 6 | Romans 15:14 | January 22 | Colossians 3:18–4:1 |
| January 7 | Colossians 1:1–14 | January 23 | Colossians 4:2–6 |
| January 8 | Romans 14:1–12 | January 24 | Isaiah 52 |
| January 9 | Romans 14:13–23 | January 25 | Colossians 4:7–18 |
| January 10 | Proverbs 9 | January 26 | Romans 15:17–21 |
| January 11 | Romans 15:1–13 | January 27 | Luke 7:1–10 |
| January 12 | Romans 15:14 | January 28 | Luke 7:11–17 |
| January 13 | Romans 15:15–16 | January 29 | Luke 7:18–35 |
| January 14 | Colossians 1:15–29 | January 30 | Luke 7:36–50 |
| January 15 | Colossians 2:1–15 | January 31 | 2 Kings 5:1–14 |
| January 16 | Colossians 2:16–23 | | |

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



**Stephanie
Broadbent**



**Hannah
Dakanay**



**Taze &
Shaelin Lamb**



Aaron Vick



**Dalton &
Caroline
Williams**



**Will
Niederhauser**



MOUNT VERNON

BAPTIST CHURCH