



2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: June 19th - 25th

Sermon: June 18th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus

June 19

1 Corinthians 16:13

Our devotions for this week are going to be more topical than usual. Typically, we attempt to tease out the implications and applications of the specific passage of Scripture for the purpose of diving deeper into the truths that our sermon text contains. However, on special occasions, we pivot from our general approach in order to explore and unearth some generic truths. In light of Sunday's occasion (Father's Day), this week provides one such opportunity to think about and consider the biblical teaching on the topic of biblical manhood and fatherhood.

Even a decade ago, the idea of talking about good, strong masculinity would not have caused even the slightest stir. Since mankind was formed by God, every culture of note has understood and cherished the truth that men and women are created differently as they are designed for unique reasons. The idea of a "birthing person" or a "non-binary" individual would be both foreign and absurd to our forefathers. Consequently, I would assume that the truth of today's devotion would be both assumed and uninteresting to previous generations. Nevertheless, the church does not get to dictate the issues of popular culture, but she is called to speak to them. Considering this truth, I want to talk to you this week about the biblically unshakeable category of manhood.

Today's text constitutes the beginning because it demonstrates that God considers manhood to be an absolute. Paul's exhortation is that his readers, who qualify, should "act like men". What strikes me about the passage is that Paul doesn't take the time to immediately define or explain what he means. That is not to say that the Bible is silent on the issue, as we will see the Scripture says quite a bit about manhood, but it is to point out the truth that manhood is something that Paul understood and believed his readers already comprehended as well.

Folks, if I were to create a list of all the needs of our day, at the top of the list would be the cultural necessity of more true men. The world has taken issue with masculinity precisely because true, biblical masculinity is one of the great obstacles to the prosperity of sin. When churches and societies are populated by biblically faithful men, the Kingdom of God advances, and the kingdom of this world deteriorates. This means that our consideration of biblical manhood is not some cultural aside, it strikes at the very heart of our mission to build the Kingdom.

I want to end today's devotion with a question. When you read this statement of Paul's, do you know what he means? If someone were to ask you, what does it look like to act like a man, what would you tell them? I pray that you already have an answer but if you do not, my hope is that this week's devotions will assist you as we develop a deeper understanding of the wisdom and necessity of Godly men.

June 20

1 Corinthians 14:20

When we dive into a topical study on a subject as large as manhood, we must acknowledge that 7 devotions will never be sufficient to exhaust the topic. There are many more things that could be said about biblical manhood, but it would be fair to say that a major aspect of biblical manhood can be summarized by saying that godly men act with mature courage. Courage without maturity is often nothing but foolishness and there is not biblical maturity without courage. So, over the next 6 days, I want to tease out these topics from a biblical perspective.

Today, I want us to see that maturity requires developed thinking. In all aspects of life, the mature person is the one who thinks before he acts. Think about the immature among us, aren't they marked by an underdeveloped mind? Young men can be so quick to jump into some situation without getting the full story because they are immature in their thinking. How often have we seen adolescents make foolish decisions because they are either unwilling or unable to examine the situation before they start. We understand that youth are often victim to frivolous or even dangerous occurrences because they are immature in their thinking and this same concept applies not just to the physical world but to the spiritual realm as well.

Churches and countries that do not have biblically informed and grounded men are on a collision course with disaster. I would argue that the chief issue in the church today and, therefore in society, is a dearth of biblically grounded men. Churches are obviously wandering into the bizarre and shallow and the effect is disastrous. Churches don't know what they believe or why they believe it and the reason, from a horizontal perspective, is largely grounded in the fact that no men are acting like, well, men! The same could be said for the culture which has been totally hijacked into rote emotionalism and subjectivism largely because there are few men who are thinking and leading at all.

Paul exhorts men not to be "childish" in their thinking. Childishness is demonstrated by selfishness, laziness, unstableness and a lack of discernment. Men today spend more time on their computers, attached to their video games, speaking about trivial things with their trivial buddies and politicking for a corrupt political party (I do mean both of them) than they do reading and studying Scripture, analyzing the culture and buttressing their family's and churches against the coming onslaught of Satan and those who do his bidding.

Somewhere along the line, men have bought the lie that thinking is feminine. We have been duped into believing that reading and studying Scripture, examining culture and learning from those before and applying those truths in an orderly and thought-provoking manner is beneath or unbecoming of a man. We would rather not think at all (unless the thinking is geared towards the trivial matters of life). The result is a generation of people who are falling in the battle. Our churches are not reinforced against the thoughts of this world, our families are distracted and unmotivated to pursue Christ and our world is largely unaffected by the Gospel because the Gospel and its implications has not been clearly thought through nor articulated to a world that desperately needs to hear it by the men that God has designed and called for the task. Oh, dear brother in Christ, its time to THINK along our journey to act like men.

June 21

Hebrews 5:12

Perhaps some of you read yesterday's devotion and wondered about the basis I have for making some of my more forward claims. For instance, how do I know that our churches (plural) are largely unequipped to stand before the enemy? What proof is there that the church is unhealthy and how do I draw a line from unhealthy churches back to a lack of godly men. Well.... I'm glad you asked 😊

The truth is that there are many sources that gauge theological understanding in America. One such resource is done by Ligonier ministries. It is entitled "the State of Theology" and a new survey is released every two years. This survey gathers information from evangelical, regular church attenders and, by virtue of its history, has been a marvelous, if discouraging, resource in demonstrating the overall trend of biblical literacy and convictions within the church.

What we find when we look at this study is a very clear trend away from biblical fidelity. For example, the latest study which was released last year shows us that 51 percent of evangelicals believe that God learns and adapts to the world (thereby denying the biblical doctrine of the immutability of God and the clear teaching of Scripture Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). 71 percent of evangelicals believe that we are born innocent, 53 percent of evangelicals believe the Bible contains mistakes (up from 41 percent who believed that there were errors in the Scriptures in 2014) and 38 percent of evangelicals surveyed believed that religious belief is a matter of personal opinion, not objective truth. Folks, these are bedrock, foundational issues and the people surveyed are the EVANGELICALS among us! The simple truth is that the church is woefully unhealthy.

Now, how do we know that this has anything to do with men? Well, the answer is that Godly men are the ones designed by God to teach. Men are to lead their households and instruct in truth (1 Timothy 3:4-5) and this means that a lack of biblical understanding in the church is directly correlated with a lack of biblical thinking and teaching in the home and pulpits of America.

Today's passage deals with this issue, and it does so in a remarkably clear way. The point of the text is that the Christian faith is meant to be understood, internalized and then passed along. Those who are faithful in their walk will be fervent in their commitment to teach others and those who are not learning and growing will need someone to teach them the same truths.... again.

What we have in our churches today are people who need to be taught the same, basic truths a second time. They've heard truth (some more than others) but because there is no commitment to internalizing and passing along what has been relayed, there is no growth and no maturity. Men, we are called to lead in this manner. It's time to learn in order to teach.

June 22

Deuteronomy 31:6-7

If we stopped our study with yesterday's devotion, you might be tempted to walk away with a rather warped view of manhood. The Bible does not paint a picture of exemplary manhood in the terms of a brainiac that never leaves his own personal, and growing, library. There is much more to being a godly man than knowing good, biblical truths and how they apply, we must also walk in those truths... with courage.

Today's passage is an example of how these two things mesh. You will notice that our text contains a rather famous directive from Moses to Joshua. It's repeated for us in Joshua 1 but I picked Deuteronomy 31 for a specific reason. What I want you to see today is the relationship between the truths of the Word of God and the courage that must follow. If Godly manhood is mature courage, we must recognize that courage that passes muster is predicated on the maturity that only God's Word provides.

Deuteronomy is largely concerned with the reiteration of the law. Moses is summarizing and reminding the people of God of the Word of God. The reason why this is so important to us is that Moses' reminders culminate with a charge. It was in light of what God had revealed to the people that Joshua could be strong and courageous. Stated differently, the courage of Joshua and the people was to be grounded in the revelation of God which included God's promises to His people. God had promised the Promised Land, He had promised victory and His very presence with the people. These truths, revealed in Scripture and meditated upon by the mature mind, were the catalyst for true courage.

You see, Joshua was not like the adolescent that we discussed earlier this week. His courage was not foolishness or false bravado, it was anchored in God's character and promises. He was to stand firm in the battle precisely because he knew that God would deliver on His Word. Joshua was to lead with courage, even when things looked bleak, because of his conviction and faith in God's character and power. This is what Godly manhood looks like in a nutshell.

The faithful and mature Christian man will grow in his knowledge of truth so that he can take what he knows to be true and walk in it through the storms of life. He is not going to bow to the pressures and threats of this world, and he won't be susceptible to the deception that is rampant. Instead, he will lead his family in truth and walk in the same manner such that those under his charge can hear the truth and see God work in his obedience. The effect of this is strong families and churches! Oh, for the day that the church isn't tossed to and fro by the foolish and carnal waves of false doctrine. Oh, for the day when the church is characterized by men who lead with courage, even when the enemy appears on the horizon.

We need godly men who are unaffected by the winds of the storm and immovable on the battlefield. We need men who are persuaded that God is real and that He is faithful and lead their families and churches in pursuit of Him. This is what it means to be a man. Manhood is not arrogance nor is it brashness, it is biblically informed conviction that flows out of us into our daily personal and corporate lives.

June 23

Daniel 1:8

What's the difference between arrogant bravado and mature courage? The biblical answer is the biblical absolutes! It is absolutely arrogant to stand on our personal whims and trust that we will persevere, but it is nothing short of faithful courage to stand on the Word of God and trust that God will intervene and preserve us. Over the next three days, I want to examine three examples of biblical manhood in action. In each of these cases, the men we study will stand up to the world and its exhortations for biblically informed reasons. Therefore, these men serve as marvelous examples of mature thinking in courageous action or... manhood.

The story of Daniel is a famous one. We know that he will ultimately be thrown into the lion's den, but today's passage records an instance on the road to that fateful evening. The issue at hand relates to dietary considerations. If you remember, God had given His people very explicit commands regarding what was clean and unclean to eat. Daniel has been taken captive (a sign of God's judgment) and he's now in the program to groom Babylonian leaders. As a part of this initiative, Daniel has been assigned to eat what is provided and many of those items are forbidden by God.

The reason why the setting matters so much is grounded in God's revelation or His Word. Daniel knew that God had not allowed for such an action, and this informs his response. Please note, at the risk of belaboring the point, that Daniel's courageous action was not grounded on his own sense or on a whim that God may not want him to eat these things. Daniel's response is the courageous response of a mature thinker who has been grounded in the Word. Daniel knew what God had said and now he was going to act with courage in faith that God would provide.

Notice second that Daniel does not waiver in his commitment. There is no hint in the text of Daniel considering whether these rules apply. One can imagine that there was a temptation to just "go along". Perhaps Daniel could concoct some bizarre theological position that would justify his actions. Maybe he could claim, like many theological liberals today, that God's Word was grounded in a different cultural context and, therefore, it had no application in Babylon centuries after the command was given. Perhaps Daniel could have justified his disobedience with an evangelistic veneer. After all, how could he win against the Babylonians if he offended them by refusing to eat their food?

If you know anything about the theological landscape of our day, you will realize that I did not just pull those examples out of thin air. There are many churches, even churches in our own local area, that employ similar arguments today. What those churches need is for someone to step up and act like a man! Daniel knew what God said and he had the courage to walk in his convictions. This is mature courage, and it is a marvelous example of biblical manhood.

June 24

Genesis 7:10-16

Today's text records for us another monumental story in Scripture. The main character of this passage is Noah. Noah was God's chosen servant to preserve people through the floodwaters which were brought on by His right wrath against sin. As the story of Genesis unfolds, the Bible tells us that God was fed up with the wickedness and depravity that was characteristic of the people of the earth. Consequently, the Lord chooses Noah to build an ark in order to ride out the flood which was prompted by God in order to wipe the rest of sinful men off the planet.

It always amuses me when I see children's artist renderings of the ark. I was always brought up to believe that being on the ark was pleasant! These paintings often have a giraffe sticking his head out of the window and Noah at the front of the ship with a big smile on his face. I'm not sure that these scenes could be any farther from the truth! Consider the journey for a moment... Noah is packed onto this ship with animals that stink and produce certain things that stink as well if you know what I mean. He is tossed to and fro by the waves and responsible for keeping things in order for months (plural)!

What would cause a man to go through this? The answer is mature courage. I will admit that the next part of this devotion is a bit of conjecture, but I think it is important and helpful. Mature courage requires conviction in the storm, but it also demands a certain ability to deal with ridicule. Our passage for the day records the moment that the rain began to fall. I've often thought about this date because it was the very moment that Noah was vindicated.

Think for a moment about Noah's life prior to the flood's arrival. Here he is, living amongst pagans and building a boat at the Lord's directive for the express purpose of surviving a flood that would wipe the rest of the world off the map. Do you think that Noah was well liked or respected? My guess is that he was the talk of the town... for the purpose of ridicule! How often do you think Noah was called a nut or psychotic or "holier than thou"? How many times was he ostracized or mocked? My assumption is that he lived as the butt of most of the jokes and yet he persevered.

What would cause a man to live so courageously? The answer is a mature conviction in God's Word. God had spoken and that settled the issue for Noah. He knew that others would not understand. He recognized that his message would not be popular, but he persevered. There is a word in there for modern men today. If we are going to be faithful, we must be courageous! The world is not going to understand why we do what we do. Many will mock our choices, question our decisions and accuse us of being simple and/or uninformed, but God has spoken. God's Word constitutes the foundation of our lives and thoughts and in Him we will see vindication in time.

June 25

Luke 22:42

We couldn't do a study on biblical manhood without looking at the person of Christ! Jesus is THE prototype and example for all men to emulate and so it follows that we should look to His life and example to see whether we identify the traits of mature courage. Our passage for the day shows us that Jesus indeed lived with these characteristics and, therefore, we should as well.

The scene in Luke 22 is as somber and weighty as any in the Bible. Jesus knows that He is headed to the cross in short order and He recognizes that the cross is the place and moment in time where God will pour out His wrath against the sins of His children on Him, the sacrificial lamb. The gravity of this moment is heavy on Christ, so much so that the Bible says that He sweat drops of blood (a medical condition called hematohidrosis which is brought on by extreme stress).

The question that we must ask, and answer today is what gave Jesus the strength to carry on? How was He able to endure such difficulty? The answer is that Jesus had a conviction that His suffering was in accordance with God's Word and He had a further belief in the character of His Father.

You see, the Bible had foreshadowed this moment for centuries. Isaiah, for instance, speaks about the coming Messiah being bruised, crushed and beaten. The sacrificial system was meant to demonstrate to the people of God of their need for someone to take their place in atonement for sin. All these things came before Christ appeared and they all affirmed that Jesus was to go, faithfully and obediently, to the cross.

Jesus was not in the garden by accident, and He knew this to be the case! His presence and willingness to go was grounded in Scripture which is why He can end His prayer by affirming His desire for the Father's will to be carried out. We could say that Jesus' courage was rooted in the revelation of God and the covenant the Father had made with the Son from eternity past.

These were the things that led to Jesus' famous statement "nevertheless, not my will but yours be done." Christ was the most mature, biblically saturated thinker in the history of mankind and, consequently, He was the most courageous man who ever walked this planet as well. His unshakeable trust in God's character and Word formed the ground of His conviction (at least in Jesus' humanity).

The point for us is quite simple... we are to emulate Jesus in His example. He is the ultimate model of biblical manhood. In Christ we see a sacrificial, meek and humble man but that is not to the detriment of His courage and conviction. Jesus had steel in His spine, He was unbending and immovable in the face of the Jewish elite and the Roman authorities. He was set on obedience to His Father as revealed in His Word and He had contemplated all the ramifications and responsibilities of this moment long before the time came. How about you men? Do you know what God requires of you? Are you walking in conviction that is grounded in truth? Are you willing to endure difficulty and mockery and slander for the cause of Christ? Are you mature thinkers and courageous in your convictions?