

CHAPTER I

The Life and Death of Manhood



In an interview with Bryan “Baby” Williams, leader of the Young Money Cash Money Billionaires, a question was raised about the term *bling, bling*.

This term is a colloquialism used first in hip-hop culture to speak about the mass accumulation of material wealth. In this culture, every time there is an accomplishment that leads to gaining more wealth, “bling, bling” is announced to self and others as a way of saying that more has been brought into one’s possession. In regard to the term, Baby stated, “I wish we would have trademarked that phrase cause we originated it. People would have to pay us every time they used the term and it would trace them back to us” [paraphrase].

That’s how trademarking works. It’s a claim on something original, something unique, that establishes ownership. Many might use, build on, or add something to the original, but the trademark establishes the absolute first origin of something. It’s important in business; it’s more important in creation.

God holds the trademark on creation. More specifically, God holds the trademark on manhood. All of God's creation was brought into being with a sense of care and love, but when He created man He didn't speak him into existence as He did the stars, water, land, and animals. Instead God innovated a new technique in creation. God *formed* man. This term is rich in depth and meaning—God handmade man by sculpting Him from what He had already created.

Formed means “fashioned, shaped, or forged, usually by plan or design.”¹ The term implies an intentionality; forming isn't haphazard. To *form* is to devise, prepare, i.e., think about future actions with a particular plan of action as an extension of forming an object by artistic, careful design.² God is not a mad scientist, unknowingly experimenting with creation to see what He would come up with. He is a thoughtful, careful, loving, artist who knows exactly what He's after in the process of creation. That means God did not haphazardly create man but was fully aware of His expectations and desires of His creation even before He began.

Genesis 1:26–28 is considered a summary statement of the creation of both men and women. In that summary, though, we find a statement of purpose along with mere description. The key is in the word *image*. Those five letters are jam-packed with fundamental theological truth that gives us insight not only into God's original intent in human creation, but also His ongoing purpose for us in the world. The NET Bible note on the terms *likeness* and *image* is helpful to aid our understanding:

The word *dému* (“likeness”) is an abstract noun; its verbal root means “to be like; to resemble.” In the Book of Genesis the two terms describe human beings who in some way reflect the form and the function of the creator. The form is more likely stressing the spiritual rather than the physical. The “image of God” would be the God-given mental and spiritual capacities that enable people to **relate to God** and to **serve him by ruling** over the created order as his earthly vice-regents.

In our image, after our likeness. Similar language is used in the instructions for building the tabernacle. Moses was told to make it “according to the pattern” he was shown on the mount (Exod. 25:9–10). Was he shown a form, a replica, of the spiritual sanctuary in the heavenly places? In any case, what was produced on earth functioned as the heavenly sanctuary does, but with limitations.³

Man was meant to function like a mirror—something to reflect the image of God into creation. Humanity, made in the image of God, was created to be an earthly representation of who God is. In man’s God-given dominion and rule over creation, he was to display the ultimate rule of God in his limited dominion.

Man as an Image Bearer

Representation and Responsibility

As an image bearer, man was to reflect God’s heavenly reign on earth. In other words, man represents God by virtue

of being in His image. In representing God, man was to glorify the God who created him.

This is an incredible responsibility. Both Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 describe this responsibility as the act of subduing and caring for creation. The general meaning of the verb in those passages appears to be “to bring under one’s control for one’s advantage.” In subduing creation, man is given the ability to use it for his personal benefit on God’s terms. In that light, the command in Genesis 1:28 might be paraphrased like this: “Harness its potential and use its resources for your benefit.”⁴ Since God would later create the woman to come along side the man in this task, it’s understood that they together would understand and embrace their role and pass this understanding onto their children.

The word *care* in Genesis 2:15 (NIV) carries a similar sense. The man is called “to work it and keep” (ESV) the garden. In essence, this responsibility was a job. Grudem states,

Immediately upon creating man in Genesis 2, God puts *man* to work, stewarding and ruling in the world that is *God’s* own creation. Man is given responsibility to cultivate the garden, and man is called upon to name the animals. So, while the garden in which man dwells is God’s, God gives to man the responsibility to steward it. And, importantly, while the animals are God’s, God gives to man the right and responsibility to name them (note especially the statement in Genesis 2:19 that whatever the *man* called the living creature, “that was its name”).⁵

Whenever we talk about this at Epiphany Fellowship, the women go crazy. They love hearing that the man got a job before he had a woman! Work was good in those days; more than good, in fact. Then and now, in a redeemed sense, work is a key part of who we are as men.

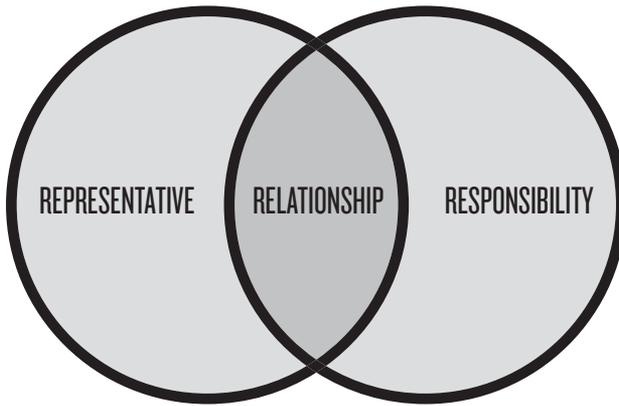
Man was called to subdue. And he was called to care. But he was also called to rule. In ruling they would serve as God's vice-regents⁶ on Earth. This rule was not to be done with an iron fist. If humans were really going to reflect the image of God's rule on their own, they would accept the responsibility of seeing to the welfare of that which is put under them and the privilege of using it for their benefit.⁷ Man would have led the effort in that he was the first created and the first to receive these instructions from the Lord (1 Tim. 2:13).

Relationship

We need to be careful here that we don't miss one of the chief components of being God's image bearer. As an image bearer, man is to subdue. He is to care and work. And he is to rule. All these components are key, but what is missing up to this point is the *relationship*. Having a relationship with Yahweh was what made image bearing more than just some sort of political appointment. God designed humans with a unique capacity for relationship because it was His intent that this centerpiece of His creation, man and woman, would be relationally connected to Him for eternity. Without relationship none of the other aspects of being an image bearer would matter. Think about it like this: If a father relates to his children only based on the chores they are supposed to do, that

child would grow up with a warped sense of love, accomplishment, and self-worth. Similarly, our relationship with God was intended to be much more than a stale deistic relationship where He creates and leaves things on Earth to us.

Emulsifier chart:



As the chart above points out our identity as God's representatives, our activity of the responsibilities He has given us, and our connectivity to Him in relationship are all aspects of being created in the image of God. However, identity and activity flow from connectivity:



Relationship with God is so central to what it means to be an image bearer that Jeremiah states it is the only thing man can boast about in relation to himself:

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD." (Jer. 9:23–24 ESV)

The word *know* is a term of intimacy. It's the same word used of God's intimate knowledge of the prophet in Jeremiah 1:5. When God restored man through Jesus Christ, the first thing highlighted isn't ruling or responsibility, but relationship (John 17:3). The point is that relationship is the most compelling factor driving what it means to be made in the image of God.

God gave the first woman to the first man to be a suitable helper to him and to accompany him as a co-image bearer to live out representation, responsibility, and relationship not only in how they related to God but also how they related to each other. The man's form and nature are matched by the woman's as she reflects him and complements him as an equal, yet distinct partner. They correspond to each other. In other words, the woman has everything (in essence and value) that God invested in the man.⁸ Therefore, both have an equal relationship with God, but each is distinct in how he or she represents Him and lives out their responsibility toward Him.

What Killed Manhood?

There was much more wrapped up in that piece of fruit in the garden than just a bad decision. With sin, there always is. We talk ourselves into thinking that sin is just a bad choice; it's not. It's much deeper than that for us, just as it was for Adam. When Adam chose willful rebellion against the law of God, he was choosing to forfeit his birthright by rejecting his calling to represent, be responsible, and enjoy his relationship with God, his wife, and the rest of creation. This single act placed in motion the initial and progressive fall of creation and its order, one whose effects still ravage every facet of the world today. We could speak at length on all things that were lost—peace, harmony, joy, order—these were put aside for temporary pleasure.

Did Adam know the full implications of his choice? Probably not. But sin is like that. It blinds us to the consequences of our actions. We get so nearsighted when we see something we want to experience that everything else fades away. Adam chose to set aside his representation of God, responsibility for God, and relationship with God, and these things were lost because of the price of his sin. Although men and women are equal, their function in the fall was different. As the man, Adam is held responsible for it (Rom. 5:12). Sin entered through Adam and spread to men and women alike. When Adam sinned, all of God's intentions for man fell with man. Peace and enjoyment of God and His creation was lost. The spread of God's reign across the earth was lost. Dominion over the world was lost. The development of the undeveloped earth for the Lord was lost. Gone.

Adam made this choice in the most perfect of environments. It would only get worse from there. As more people were born, after the fall in Genesis 3, they would be born without Adam's responsibility, representation, and relationship, at least in the sense that God meant in the beginning. The definition of being an image bearer of God would be marred at the core of man's being for millennia. Man would struggle and replace what was meant to be reflected as a sign of his relationship with Yahweh with himself and creation. Without a relationship with God to navigate and give value to responsibility and relationship, humankind would spiral out of control.

Consequently, manhood was lost along with the rest of God's original design for creation. Instead of responsibility, representation, and relationship, things like chauvinism, violence, passivity, insecurity, and addiction would characterize generation after generation of men in a continually increasing way.

Things Got Worse

Genesis 2:17 records the solemn warning God gave to Adam: he would "surely die," or literally "dying you shall die," if he ate from the tree. The death described ominously here encompasses both a spiritual and physical sense. Physical death is pointing to termination of physical life; worse still, spiritual death means the termination of relationship with God. Once separated from God, men would continue in a downward spiral over the ages as that separation became more and more fully fleshed out.

One of the saddest statements about the state of man is found in Genesis 6:5–6.

“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.” (ESV)

Chilling. Man, the centerpiece of God’s creative activity, His very representative meant to be the apex of the projection of His glory, was so grievous to God’s heart that God was sorry He had ever made man.⁹ Since Genesis 3, man continued to devolve until, in Genesis 6, God took an inventory of the state of mankind. All that man intended to be and do was being used for evil intent. Responsibility and representation had fallen to selfish motives of personal gain. Man was using the power that God gave him to rule as a way to dominate and corrupt what God once called good.

Sin Experts

Fast-forward to now, and not much has changed. Things are getting worse, not better. In our cities men are becoming more and more inventive in their acts of crime and violence. If Hollywood is a cultural barometer, which it often is, we can see example after example of our capacity for evil. In the movie *Seven*, two police officers seek to stop a serial killer who justifies his murders by positioning himself as a vigilante creating a murderous masterpiece against those who personified the seven deadly sins: envy, greed, lust, anger, sloth, gluttony,

and pride. Each murder is a gory—and creative—depiction of the particular sin of the guilty. The guilty are punished with an even more perverse form of their sin of choice. As you watch the movie, you get a visceral sense at how innovative all of us are at sinning.

The longer creation exists in a state of separation from God, the effects of that separation become more and more clear. First Timothy 3, written thousands of years after the events recorded in Genesis 6, predicts this. And in our world today, two thousand years after Paul penned his letter, the depth of our depravity has come even starker into view. Our separation from God is so embedded that our dysfunction has become the new normal. From music videos to the multibillion-dollar porn industry, you see anywhere and everywhere the effects of the disastrous fall. As Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 8:11, “Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil” (ESV).

Even so, things are not as bad as they could be. God by His grace continues to restrain how comprehensively expressive man’s sin is fleshed out in the world. If the Lord gave all of mankind over to the full extent of our sinfulness, we would totally destroy ourselves. In Romans 1:24–28 Paul speaks of God giving already sinful people over to a deeper level of sinfulness. Inferentially, it seems that the Lord somehow restrains this from being a norm in the lives of all fallen humanity. Second Thessalonians 2:7 infers that the Lord in some way holds back the immensity of how destructive evil becomes on the earth. Accordingly, it is only due to the goodness and patience of the living God that any of us are still

here, as He has throughout history acted to place a cap on our wickedness.

Throughout the events recorded in the Bible, we see the Lord revealing Himself, disciplining, judging, preaching, performing miracles, and ultimately sending Jesus to keep the clutches of sin from taking full grip on creation. These intervening acts only serve to highlight the full destructive nature of sin:

As a result of the fall, sin has become universal; except for Jesus Christ no person who ever lived on this earth has been free from sin. This sad fact is acknowledged even by those who are neither adherents of Christianity nor believers of the Bible.¹⁰

Because the scope of the fall is so great, the solution to the fall must be equally great or greater. Solutions like self-help, community programming, and training groups all have their place, but it's not at the foundation. These can only help to treat the symptoms, to prolong the inevitable. We need something deeper. We need to be born again. Being born again reverses the polarity of creation (John 3). Because sin was the cause, sin must be eradicated for an end to come to the pervasive depravity in the world. And because sin has not only destroyed humanity but creation as well, all of redeemable creation must be re-created—born again in its own way—for things to finally be as they should.

Unfortunately, not all beings in the universe long for this to happen.

Attempts to Assassinate Godly Manhood

From Genesis 3 to the birth of Jesus, Satan has made it his business to destroy any attempts for manhood to be restored. We see his efforts played out in the birth of Adam and Eve's children. Abel was the righteous seed of the woman. His brother, Cain, killed him—the unrighteous seeking to destroy the righteous. The pattern continued in Exodus when Pharaoh commanded that the Hebrew boys be killed in order to lower the number of threats of rebellion, since there were more Hebrews than Egyptians.

Even during the times of captivity of the people of God in the Old Testament, it is believed that Jews who served near the kings were eunuchs. Eunuchs during that time might have held power but weren't considered to be a threat since their peculiar impairment usually rendered them among the most scorned and stigmatized members of society. In a patriarchal culture where honor was tied to male domination, the effeminate, impotent eunuch was viewed with shame and as a threatening social deviant.¹¹

Nehemiah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are thought to have been eunuchs. Even with all of the exaltation that they were experiencing in foreign lands, the enemy wanted to make sure that their power was met with shame and limitation of vision. However, even in these times, God gave glimpses of restoration. Each of these men stand the test of time as exemplary, uncompromising men even in the midst of their possible emasculation.

Male genocide and castrating manhood have consistently been the enemy's way to tarnish hope with fear. Keep reading

into the New Testament, and you'll see how the knowledge of Jesus' birth drove Herod to strive after the threat to his throne (Matt. 2). All of these physical attempts to bring the end of righteous men only mirror the greater spiritual battle. As men, we must not become lethargic in our vigilance against things that would attempt to destroy manhood.

Literal genocide is no longer politically correct today, but the enemy's threats continue in a more covert form. Homosexuality is of great debate in the world and surprisingly in the church. The redefinition of the family calls for a redefinition of God's intention for the genders. Manhood has to be refined for this ideology to work. This political ideology is a similar tactic to the brutal methods of those biblical rulers. Manhood is under attack. Again. Still. The sooner we realize it's happening, the sooner we can begin to fight back.