FREE AT HEART: A LUTHERAN RESPONSE TO WRITINGS ON BIBLICAL MASCULINITY BY DAVID CLINES AND JOHN ELDREDGE

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Many have attempted to construct a definition for biblical masculinity. From Bernard of Clairvaux to John Eldredge, Christian men have struggled with the question, "What does it take to be truly masculine in God's eyes?" American Evangelicals have attempted to answer this question in a compassionate way. However, their answers have often fallen into the ditch of legalism. This study seeks to address this vital question through the eyes of Christ-centered Lutheranism. This thesis rhetorically analyzes and reacts to two major evangelical writings on biblical masculinity and allows Scripture to speak for itself. The reader will discover that by looking to the self-sacrifice of Christ men find the answer they have been seeking. Men empowered by the means of grace are called to freely sacrifice self to glorify the Son of Man, whose love for them does not express itself in a grace-less prescription for Christian men.

INTRODUCTION

What does it take to be a real man? Do I fit God's intentions for a man? Already in high school, I remember wrestling with such questions. Gender dysphoria was not the driver of this introspection. The world around me was. While I was certain concerning my male sex, I had no such confidence in the exact parameters of the Lord's design for masculinity. I entered a sidewinding journey. As I confronted my own heart and searched theological library shelves for an answer, what I found was far worse than nothing. I uncovered the doubt and despair of my soul. I wondered if I could ever measure up to true Christian manhood.

Both popular and academic evangelical literature have misinterpreted how God's Word presents the masculine soul.[1] Evangelicals insightfully recognized the crisis of masculinity in the American scene today. Many today are wrestling with the idea that American culture promotes toxic masculinity.[2] Less and less men are active in the church.[3] Men are searching, but ironically, they are the ones needing to be found.

1. According to the National Association of Evangelicals, there are four primary characteristics of evangelicalism: conversionism (the belief that lives need to be transformed through a "born-again" experience and a lifelong process of following Jesus), activism (the demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts), biblicism (a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority), and crucicentrism (a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity). (National Association of Evangelicals, "What is an Evangelical?" *National Association of Evangelicals*, April 2019, https://www.nae.net/what-is-an-evangelical/).

2. Ellen Hendrickson defines "toxic masculinity" as a code that "masculinity requires that men are dominant over everyone else, have no needs, show no emotion and are always winning." (Ellen Hendriksen, "How to Fight Toxic Masculinity," *Scientific American*, 26 July 2019, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-to-fight-toxic-masculinity/).

3. Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study" Pew Research Center, May 2014, http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/gender-composition/.

Evangelicals have attempted this search and rescue with determination. However, their conclusions misrepresent the truth of Scripture and often drive men further into their caves of confusion.[4] Evangelicals have desired to outline how a Christian man should be built. However, these arduous efforts have created a construct that is neither beneficial nor true to the Bible. With a heart of compassion, evangelical scholarship has sought to construct a definitive scriptural framework for masculinity. Nevertheless, this pursuit has led to the dangerous arena of legalism.

I will argue in this study that Scripture presents a view of masculinity built on the foundation of Christian freedom and empowered by the means of grace. It paints a Christ-centered portrait of masculinity focused on the goal of self-sacrifice.

The modern evangelical conceptualization of masculinity was sparked by two major works: David Clines' *David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible* and John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul*. Clines revolutionized biblical masculinity studies in the academic forum,[5] and Eldredge continues to be the dominant voice injecting an evangelical view of masculinity in mainstream America today.[6] However, before we engage with these influential writings in the field of biblical masculinity, we must understand the historical progression that led to this current wave of Christian masculinity studies.

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4. John Grey, *Men are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, (New York: Harper, 1992), xxii.

5. Jon-Michael Carman wrote, "Clines, whose definitive article on David has become the starting point for modeling masculinity in the Hebrew Bible." (Jon-Michael Carman, "Abimelech the manly man? Judges 9.1-57 and the performance of hegemonic masculinity," *JSOT* 43 (2019): 305).

6. Stella Viljoen and Leandra H. Koenig-Visagie, "Gender representation in Christian book covers: A case study," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32 (2011): 1.

PART I: HISTORY OF MASCULINE THOUGHT IN CHRISTIANITY

Greco-Roman Masculinity in Early New Testament Era

As the inspired New Testament writers readied their pens, masculinity faced a crisis eerily similar to what we see in 21st century America. Being a male did not necessarily mean you were a man. Maud Gleason, a Stanford lecturer of classics, summarizes the general thought of this era in this way, "Manliness was not a birthright. It was something that had to be won."[7] The field of masculinity studies would not emerge until the 1980s but attempts to define masculinity have their roots in antiquity.[8] Cultural expectations dictated who fit the masculine criteria. In the Roman world, there was a wide variety of so-called "masculine performances" through which a male could attain the masculine threshold.[9] These "performances" were not static. The concept of masculinity was always up for negotiation within Roman culture.

In general, as culture shifts and modifies, the conception of masculinity morphs as well. However, despite the cultural change regarding how to successfully "do gender," there is always one unchangeable and foundational version of masculinity. This cultural phenomenon has been coined "hegemonic masculinity."[10] The Greeks and Romans viewed gender as a single-sex construct. The body was not multiple sexes; rather, it differed only regarding extroverted or inverted genitalia. Masculinity was not merely a matter of anatomical nature, "but something

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7. Maud W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 159.

8. Eric C. Stewart, "Masculinity in the New Testament and Early Christianity," *BTB* 46 (2016): 91.

9. Eric C. Stewart, "Masculinity in the New Testament and Early Christianity," *BTB* 46 (2016): 92.

10. The term "hegemonic masculinity" was coined in 1985, defined as "the dominant ideal of masculinity in a society against which other masculinities are defined." (Tim Carrigan, R.W. Connell, and John Lee, "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity," *Theory and Society* 14 (1985): 551–604).

which had to be achieved constantly."[11] In other words, the idea of gender was on a never-ending continuum. A person's gender pendulum could swing toward femininity or masculinity, depending on the action.[12] In the Greco-Roman world, a man had to prove his masculinity "constantly in the public arena."[13] A man had to possess the proper masculine perception in order to enjoy the status of ανήρ rightfully.[14]

There were several realms in which a man could accomplish this feat. It could be in the political arena, the environment of war, rhetorical debate, or sexual conquests, but there was an underlying purpose in this quest: control. As Brittany Wilson articulates, "The 'rules' of ancient masculinity dictate that a man is 'manly' when he exerts control over himself and others, but 'unmanly' when he loses self-control or falls under the control of others."[15] If a man were passive or unable to exert his dominance in a given situation, his manliness would be in doubt. Such a passivity would be considered inherently feminine, which no man would desire. Eric Stewart summarizes this prevailing thought well:

> Put most simply, to be manly was to avoid being feminine.… This is seen even in the ancient vocabulary: the Greek word ανδρεία, meaning courage, is derived from the word

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11. Moisés Mayordomo, "Act Like Men!" (1 Cor 16:13): Paul's Exhortation in Different Historical Contexts," *CrossCurrents* 61 (2011): 516.

12. There is a distinction between biological sex and the conceptualization of gender. Andrew T. Walker distinguishes it well: "Sexuality refers to God's anthropological design and pattern for the procreative relationship between male and female and to the experience of erotic desire within that design. Gender refers to biological differences in male and female embodiment and the different cultural ways in which the creational distinctions between male and female are manifested." (Andrew T. Walker, "Gender and Sexuality," *The Gospel Coalition*, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/gender-and-sexuality/).

13. Peter-Ben Smit, "The Ritual (De)Construction of Masculinity in Mark 6: A Methodological Exploration on the Interface of Gender and Ritual Studies," *Neot* 50 (2016): 330.

14. Translated: "man"

15. Brittany L. Wilson, "The blinding of Paul and the power of God: masculinity, sight, and self-control," *JBL* 133 (2014): 371.

> for man (ανήρ/ άνδρας), and the Latin word for manliness, *virtus*, is derived from *vir*, meaning man.… For the Greeks and Romans, "nature" dictated that males be active (penetrative in sexual terms, assertive in public affairs), powerful, rational, spiritual (as opposed to "fleshly") and superior, while females were passive, weak, irrational, fleshly, and wet.[16]

The *forma* of masculinity in the ancient Roman world promoted not merely an aversion to passivity, but it also promoted self-control. The Stoic tenet of self-control in every circumstance is what constituted *virtus*.[17] Of course, few men could claim masculinity from this hegemony. Nevertheless, they held up this standard as the one that all men, if they were indeed men, needed to attain. It was the law by which one's manhood was either established or denied.

In a radically countercultural way, Christianity threatened to upend the masculine *status quo*. Ephesians 5 razes the Greco-Roman construct. When Paul writes, "Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands,"[18] this would have caused no disagreement, but when Paul calls husbands to "love (their) wives,"[19] this would have been jaw-dropping. Such an unheard-of command would have scandalized husbands. Mark Keown puts it this way, "This is a rather unexpected statement in the ancient world, where injunctions to husbands to love one's wife are

16. Stewart, "Masculinity in the New Testament," 94.

17. *Virtus* according to the Roman historian Sallust was earned by the *novus homo* (new man) through the performance of *ingenium* (talent, character, intelligence). (Donald Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 47-49).

18. Eph 5:22, NIV. Unless otherwise noted, the NIV will be used for the Bible passages referenced in this thesis.

19. Eph 5:25

rare."[20] It is so rare that a similar law code has yet to be discovered.[21] The idea that a husband should love his wife to the point of self-sacrifice contradicted the Greco-Roman ideal of masculine autonomy. This placed men in the somewhat precarious state of giving their wives priority instead of asserting total control.

The Christian church, from its outset, had an entirely different mind concerning masculinity. Paul radically shifted the concept of self-control. Self-control is not a means to validate one's manhood. Self-control is a conduit for the *telos* of masculinity as I intend to explore. The radical scriptural truths found in Ephesians 5 will be unpacked later in this writing. For now, we must turn back to the historical progression of Western masculine thought.

As the patristic age progressed and the medieval period emerged, the Pauline notion of self-sacrifice found in Ephesians 5 became misconstrued. Self-sacrifice became self-abandonment. By the 3rd and 4th centuries, asceticism began to gain a following.[22] Ironically, this monastic lifestyle shared much of the same ideology belonging to the former Roman masculine construct.

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20. Mark Keown, "Paul's Vision of a New Masculinity," *Colloquium* 48 (2016): 54.

21. Wolfgang Schräge, "Zur Ethik der neutestamentlichen Haustafeln," *NTS* 21 (1974): 13. I have not found any other more recent discoveries since this article's publication.

22. Francis Joseph Bacchus, "Eastern Monasticism Before Chalcedon (A.D. 451)," Vol. 10 of *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, edited by Charles George Herbermann. 15 vols, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911.

Because a monastic must rely entirely on God alone, marriage would merely be a conduit for a person's lust.[23] If this is true, it is only logical that Paul is not speaking about a physical marriage relationship between two people in Ephesians 5, but a spiritual relationship between God and the individual believer. That is why he says it is a "profound mystery."[24] From this line of reasoning, it is possible to trace the beginnings of bridal mysticism.

Bernard of Clairvaux and the Emergence of Bridal-Mysticism

By the 12th century, the "four strands" approach of biblical hermeneutics was in full swing.[25] The full meaning of Scripture, it was thought, could not be understood until each strand was adequately fleshed out. Bernard of Clairvaux was a pioneer in this hermeneutical process.[26]

Bernard brought a fresh take on the bridal motif found not only in Ephesians 5 but throughout Scripture. In his revolutionary sermon series on the Old Testament book of Song of Songs, Bernard altered how people understood what it means to be the "bride of Christ." Until

23. Evagrius said, "Cut the desire for many things out of your heart and so prevent your mind being dispersed and your stillness lost." (Benedicta Ward, *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), 10).

24. Eph 5:32

25. The four strands of medieval hermeneutics consisted of the literal (what is happening in the text), the typological (how does the text connect the Old and New Testaments), the moral (how should one act in response to this story), and the anagogical (how does this apply to the last days of world's existence).

26. For further biographical information on Bernard see G.R. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

his writing, the Christian church at-large saw the bride and bridegroom relationship as "primarily something corporate."[27] Bernard made it personal. He writes,

> Shall I not find that a richer grace is poured out upon me from him whom the Father has anointed with the oil of gladness more than all his companions, if he will deign to kiss me with the kiss of his mouth (Ps 44:8)? His living and effective word (Heb 4:12) is a kiss; not a meeting of lips, which can sometimes be deceptive about the state of the heart, but a full infusion of joys, a revelation of secrets, a wonderful and inseparable mingling of the light from above and the mind on which it is shed, which, when it is joined with God, is one spirit with him (1 Cor 6:17).[28]

Jack Kilcrease explains, "As mutually desiring subjects, the soul and God become entranced with one another through the process of mystical ascent. In order to make itself attractive to God, the soul cooperates by adorning itself with the fruits of virtue through the power of grace."[29] Bernard, through his concept of "bridal mysticism," took the romantic notions of the bride-bridegroom relationship and appropriated it to the relationship of the individual Christian with God.

Bernard's interpretation introduced an entirely new perspective on what it means to be a man of God. The man of God must be a lover of God. Despite Martin Luther's proper application of this motif back to the corporate notion of early Christianity,[30] this conceptualization would eventually cross the Atlantic into America.

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27. Jack D. Kilcrease III, "The Bridal-Mystical Motif in Bernard of Clairvaux and Martin Luther," *JEH* 65 (2014): 166.

28. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2005), 216.

29. Kilcrease, "The Bridal-Mystical Motif," 269.

30. Kilcrease explains, "The Reformer uses a familiar patristic medieval image of Christ as bridegroom to describe his understanding of justification and the Christian life. (Kilcrease, "The Bridal-Mystical Motif," 264).

As more and more persecuted protestants found religious asylum in America, Bernard's bridal-mysticism journeyed along with them. Cotton Mather, an 18th century Puritan preacher considered by some to be the "first American evangelical,"[31] carried on the notion of bridal-mysticism, "Our Savior does marry himself unto the Church in general, but He does also marry himself to every individual believer."[32] The admixture of Luther's thought and Bernard's is clear in Mather's words.

It is conclusive that Scripture uses the lavish colors of the bride-bridegroom relationship to paint the corporate relationship between Christ and his church. By repurposing the marriage motif to the individual Christian, a challenging church environment confronted American men. David Murrow, the author of *Why Men Hate Church*, believes this "Jesus-is-my-boyfriend" imagery caused men to seek their masculinity in other sources like exploration and industrialization.[33] As is today, masculinity had a crisis on its hands. Is being a man encapsulated in being a bride of Christ? The Muscular Christianity movement had much to say on that question.

The Muscular Christianity Reaction

As with the case of bridal mysticism, the Muscular Christianity movement began across the Atlantic as well. Charles Kingsley, considered the founder of Muscular Christianity, took issue

31. Rick Kennedy, *The First American Evangelical: A Short Life of Cotton Mather*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

32. Cotton Mather and Samuel Mather, "The Mystical Marriage: A Brief Essay on the Grace of the Redeemer Espousing the Soul of the Believer" (essay written for N. Belknap, 1728), 6.

33. David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2005), 36-40.

with the rampant sentimentalism of 19th century Protestantism.[34] He longed for men to rise above mere emotionalism. Drawing from social Darwinism, he argued that the power of forceful masculinity must predominate.[35] This emphasis on the Christian man's potency would reach its zenith at the turn of the century. Proponents of Muscular Christianity believed men were shunning the church because of the sentimentalism often emphasized in Protestant churches.

Theodore Roosevelt, the most well-known adherent to this movement, wrote,

> A man's usefulness depends upon his living up to his ideals insofar as he can. It is hard to fail but it is worse never to have tried to succeed. All daring and courage, all iron endurance of misfortune make for a finer, nobler type of manhood. Only those are fit to live who do not fear to die and none are fit to die who have shrunk from the joy of life and the duty of life."[36]

One can feel the hubris of the Muscular Christianity movement in this statement. Men needed to accept the challenge of becoming a man. Roosevelt appealed to what he called the "strenuous life."[37] Being a Christian man is not conforming to the whims of society or emotion but a call to action. "It is manly to follow Christ and Christ himself is the most manly of men."[38]

Muscular Christians sought to paint Jesus in a far more masculine light. Jesus was not just a placid man calling to children. He was a "man's man" about whom "there was nothing

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34. Amy Laura Hall, "No Shortcut to the Promised Land:" The Fosdick Brothers and Muscular Christianity," *Ex Auditu* 29 (2013): 161.

35. Charles Kingsley describes the "muscular Christian" ideal of manliness: "To sketch an ideal…the perfect naturalist should be strong in body; able to haul a dredge, climb a rock, turn a boulder, walk all day …and, if he go far abroad, be able on occasion to fight for his life." (A letter quoted from this source: Malcolm Tozer, "Charles Kinsley and the 'Muscular Christian' Ideal of Manliness," *Physical Education Review* 8 (1985): 36).

36. Theodore Roosevelt, "The Great Adventure," Page 243 in vol. 19 of *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt*. Edited by Hermann Hagedorn. 20 vols. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1926.

37. Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life" Speech (Hamilton Club, Chicago, IL, April 10, 1899).

38. Mayordomo, "Act Like Men," 524.

mushy or sweetly effeminate."[39] As Tom Brown wrote, "The Lord Jesus Christ is not only the Prince of Peace; He is the Prince of War too."[40] Muscular Christianity objected to "any identification of Christianity with escape, sickliness, or lack of courage."[41] This movement would fade out through the 1920s and 30s, but, as we will consider later, many of its principles would re-emerge in John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*.

The Influence of Feminism

As Muscular Christians left the American stage, feminism quickly moved in. Before 1910, feminism was labeled the "women's movement."[42] However, by 1910 and especially into the 1920s, "the younger generation consciously rejected the maternal argument in favor of women's common human identity with men as a basis for human rights."[43] This growing movement would culminate in women receiving the right to vote in 1920. By the 1960s, feminism was mainstream, and its proponents fought for a still broader array of women's rights worldwide. Feminism also led to the creation of gender studies in general.[44] In fact, many argue that the

39. Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 42.

40. William Winn, "Tom Brown's Schooldays and the Development of 'Muscular Christianity,'" *Church History* 29 (1960): 67.

41. Winn, "Tom Brown's Schooldays," 73.

42. Estelle Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 4.

43. Freedman, *No Turning Back*, 4.

44. Robyn Wiegman, "Academic Feminism Against Itself," *Feminist Formations* 14 (2002):18.

relatively new field of masculinity studies owes its very existence to feminism.[45] The origination of gender studies and especially the formulation of reading the Bible through the lens of gender criticism would lead to the influential work of David Clines, which I will analyze in the rhetorical analysis portion of this thesis.[46] Clines is well-known in biblical studies, especially for his prolific career in interpreting the Old Testament. Clines would be the first to look at the biblical text through a masculine gender-critical lens. Interestingly, there would not be a major evangelical men's movement until the Promise Keepers.

The Promise Keeper's Movement

Strikingly similar to the impetus behind the Muscular Christianity movement, the Promise Keepers' founder, Bill McCartney, saw issues abounding among Christian men. He focused on "helping men live with integrity."[47] When he founded the organization in 1990, he was concerned that Christian men were becoming too passive. He saw a culture of "little boys" who seemed uninterested in growing up. His goal was to revitalize evangelical men in their faith. To

45. Andrea Waling, "Rethinking Masculinity Studies: Feminism, Masculinity, and Poststructural Accounts of Agency and Emotional Reflexivity," *Journal of Men's Studies* 27 (2019): 89-93.

46. Feminist biblical interpretation has several different schools of thought, but the primary purpose is largely the same. This interpretational model seeks to give women a voice in biblical interpretation. As Nancy deClaissé-Walford writes, "A feminist interpretation of the biblical text asks "how would a feminine-gendered (and I use that term deliberately) person read and appropriate a text?"" (Nancy deClaissé-Walford, "Both sides now: A feminist reading of the Enthronement Psalms," *Review and Expositor* 112 (2015): 232). For an example of feminist biblical interpretation, read deClaissé-Walford's article mentioned in this footnote.

47. "About Us," https://promisekeepers.org/promise-keepers/about-us/.

accomplish this, he proposed the "seven promises" for an evangelical man: Honor, brotherhood, virtue, commitment, change-making, unity, and obedience.[48]

The thrust for this movement seems to be the far-reaching influence of feminism.[49] Evangelicals saw a need for a responsible version of masculinity. Debates over mutual submission between men and women and women's ordination revealed the confusion over masculinity swirling in the evangelical world. As Promise Keepers became the dominant evangelical men's movement, evangelical literature zeroed in on the belief that responsible Christian men could lead Christian families to a return to biblical values and biblically defined gender roles.[50]

The Promise Keepers' membership numbers skyrocketed. By 1996, they had over a million attendees at twenty-two stadium conferences.[51] However, its rapid rise to prominence was short-lived. By 2003, less than 225,000 attended a Promise Keepers conference. Once again, evangelical masculinity needed direction, and they would receive it albeit in the form of a memoir that attempted to break down the Promise Keeper platform.

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48. "7 Promises," https://promisekeepers.org/promise-keepers/about-us/7promises/.

49. Karla B. Hackstaff, *Marriage in A Culture of Divorce* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 200-216.

50. Sally K. Gallagher and Sabrina L. Wood, "Godly Manhood Going Wild?: Transformations in Conversative Protestant Masculinity," *Sociology of Religion* 66 (2005): 136.

51. Gallagher and Wood, "Godly Manhood Going Wild," 136.

PART II: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF CLINES AND ELDREDGE

Introduction of David Clines and John Eldredge

So far, we have seen the history of how Christians viewed masculinity. From the Roman period to today, Christians have wrestled with how to form a biblical definition to capture the essence of masculinity. This journey transpired for almost two millennia before the scholarly world officially entered the conversation. As mentioned before, masculinity studies are relatively new to academic inquiry. Biblical masculinity studies, specifically, are even more recent in their origins. To understand biblical masculinity's literary scene, one must get familiar with the article that got the ball rolling.

David J.A. Clines is one of the foremost scholars of the Hebrew Scriptures. He is a professor emeritus of biblical studies at the University of Sheffield, editor of the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, and publisher and director of Sheffield Phoenix Press. One might ask how a British professor enters the American evangelical picture. He is allowed admission because of his similar theology. Clines is of the Arminian school of thought and sympathizes with a large portion of the American evangelical community.[52] His prolific work has influenced many evangelical theologians and exegetes.

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52. Daniel Deutschlander characterized Arminianism in this way: "The key for the Arminian is the will of man. It must be free to choose God, to make a decision for Christ. But if man's will is free to make a decision for Christ, then he must not be "dead in trespasses and sins." At the very least we must come into the world neutral – but probably basically good.… Arminianism exalts the individual, the subjective, the emotional, the anti-intellectual and anti-clerical streak that is so much a part of American culture: Don't follow your head! Follow your heart! Don't think too much and don't read anything very deep; just feel the Spirit!" (Daniel M. Deutschlander, "Reformed Theology and its Threat" (essay presented to the Southern Conference of the Minnesota District, 2001), 9). Clines shows this theological inclination in his essay entitled, "Predestination in the Old Testament," *in Grace for All: The Arminian Dynamics of Salvation*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock and John D. Wagner (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 112-128.

Clines was the instigator of biblical masculinity studies. His article *David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible* continues to be the benchmark of biblical masculinity studies.[53] Clines' approach to deciphering masculinity in the Bible starts when he opens the Scriptures,

> These days, I am teaching myself to say, every time I open a page of the Hebrew Bible, 'This is a male text'. And then, 'Where is its masculinity inscribed, where is it visible? How are the distinctives of masculinity expressed? What image of the maleness, what profiles of masculinity, are embedded here? What messages do the male inside the text receive about what it is to be a man? And what message do the males and females outside this text receive about how men should 'play the man'?[54]

Taking his cue from the feminist interpretational model, Clines sees a performance of masculinity in every verse he reads. Clines writes this concerning the biblical portrait of masculinity: "The fundamental characteristic of a man in Hebrew Bible literature, as I understand it, is that he should be a fighter, which means: capable of killing another man."[55] While Clines places the "warrior" motif in the predominating position, he sees several other facets that make up the biblical man. We will analyze these in the rhetorical analysis portion of the thesis. For now, it is relevant to note how his influence is still strongly felt today in biblical masculinity studies.[56]

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53. Carman writes that Clines' article on David was "the starting point for modeling masculinity in the Hebrew Bible." (Carman, "Abimelech the manly man?," 305).

54. David A. Clines, "Dancing and Shining at Sinai: Playing the Man in Exodus 32-34," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creanga (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 54.

55. Clines, "Dancing and Shining at Sinai," 55.

56. Clines' seminal status is most clearly seen by the formation of the book *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* which was the first anthology of masculine readings of Scripture published.

Enter John Eldredge, the other dominant writer of biblical masculinity. As the Promise Keepers' influence began to wane, Eldredge looked to turn a new chapter in the experience of being a Christian man. Eldredge waded through several other religions before becoming a Christian.[57] He eventually became a Christian counselor and worked for *Focus on the Family*. By 2000, he left *Focus on the Family* and launched *Ransomed Hearts Ministries* because he saw the Christian man struggling in America.

For Eldredge, masculinity is in essence "wild, dangerous, unfettered and free."[58] His book *Wild at Heart* quickly became a bestseller. When it was first released in 2001, it sold over 200,000 copies and was the fourth best-selling Christian book in the United States.[59] Today, it remains a bestseller on Amazon.[60] Eldredge lays out genuine masculinity this way:

> "We need permission…To be what we are—men made in God's image. Permission to live from the heart and not from the list of "should" and "ought to" that has left so many of us tired and bored ... So I offer this book, not as the seven steps to being a better Christian, but as a safari of the heart to recover a life of freedom, passion, and adventure."[61]

One can already see the contrast between the seven promises of the Promise Keepers and Eldredge's definition of Christian masculinity. The Promise Keepers encouraged the Christian man to be responsible and to have the qualities of honor, brotherhood, virtue, commitment,

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57. David Crumm, "An Interview with John Eldredge on Beautiful Outlaw," *ReadTheSpirit Blog*, 2011,https://web.archive.org/web/20120613053156/http://www.readthespirit.com/explore/2011/12/14/interview-with-john-eldredge-on-beautiful-outlaw.html.

58. John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2001), 12.

59. Gallagher and Wood, "Godly Manhood Going Wild?," 136.

60. At the time of this writing, it had the tag "best-seller" status in Christian Men's Issues.

61. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, xi-xii.

change-making, unity, and obedience. Eldredge saw such a seven-layered approach as restrictive to the adventurous spirit of a man.

Clines and Eldredge both attempt to arrive at conclusive interpretations of biblical masculinity. However, we will see they each fall short of the mark.

Summary of *David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible*

These are the questions that have guided Clines' approach to masculinity in Scripture:

> What does it mean to be a man in our own culture? What roles are available for young men to grow into, what images are there for adult men to imitate, what criteria exist for defining manliness? And what was it like in the world of the Bible? Was it different, or much the same? How do our answers to the first set of questions determine or influence our answers to the second set? How have our images of biblical men been shaped by our own cultural norms?[62]

In his article's introduction, Clines lists what he believes to be the five major themes that dominate most Western views of masculinity: "Don't be female.... Be successful.… Be aggressive.… Be sexual.… Be self-reliant."[63] He argues that there is nothing God-given about these components, but instead, that masculinity is a social construction, namely, "the product of historical processes."[64] After studying several biblical commentaries, he saw a void in Israelite masculinity studies. In order to begin filling in the gap, he turned to David to find answers.

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62. David A. Clines, "David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible," *JSNTSup* 1 (1995): 212.

63. Clines, "David the Man," 212-213. Each of these statements begin a paragraph in the introduction.

64. Clines, "David the Man," 214.

He admits that he cannot prove if David's masculinity was the overall masculinity concept in Israel.[65] However, he believes that the Davidic narrative likely had a very potent influence upon Israelite men and that the account was formed to reflect "the cultural norms of men of the author's time."[66] Clines believes there are five components to David's manhood: "The fighting male,"[67] "the persuasive male,"[68] "the beautiful male,"[69] "the bonding male,"[70] and the "womanless male."[71]

He places the "warrior male" first and foremost because he believes that the "essential male characteristic in the David story is to be a warrior."[72] He makes the semantic argument from the phrase וְהְיִיתֶם לַאֲנָשִׁים which literally means "become men" in the battle context of 1 Samuel 4:9 to show that to become an authentic man, one must fight.[73]

The warrior motif is not the only theme Clines sees of David's masculinity. He believes that David's assessment by a servant of Saul in 1 Samuel 16:18 shows another building block of David's manhood. The servant characterizes David as "intelligent in speech" (נְבוֹן דָּבָר). This is the only occurrence of this phrase in the entire Old Testament. Clines concurs with Norman

65. Clines, "David the Man," 216.

66. Clines, "David the Man," 216.

67. Clines, "David the Man," 216.

68. Clines, "David the Man," 219.

69. Clines, "David the Man," 221.

70. Clines, "David the Man," 223.

71. Clines, "David the Man," 225.

72. Clines, "David the Man," 216.

73. Clines, "David the Man," 219.

Whybray, who proposes that David's persuasive speech is connected to a preeminent wisdom motif in the succession narrative.[74]

Clines' section on the "beautiful male" (אִישׁ תֹּאַר) is perhaps the most countercultural to our American sociological ideology.[75] While beauty is attributed to various male and female characters in the Bible, it is especially male beauty that is emphasized by the writer of 1 and 2 Samuel.[76] It is not so much that a man can aspire to beauty, but rather that it is "very desirable" to be handsome.[77] He articulates that both David and Absalom reveal how beauty was an aspect of "real manhood" and deserving of "praise and admiration."[78]

The "bonding male" centers around David and Jonathan's deeply intimate friendship. Clines concedes that this level of intimacy was likely uncommon among male Israelites in general. Nevertheless, this model of "heroic bonding" was a suitable means by which masculinity was constructed in ancient Israel.[79] In sum, he sees male bonding as a vital vehicle to show an Israelite's subscription to the prevailing masculinity sociology and a way to promote this hegemonic masculinity.[80]

The final component to Israelite masculinity, as modeled by David, is the "womanless male." Initially, this seems like a strange aspect of David's masculinity. The Bible mentions

74. Clines, "David the Man," 220.

75. Clines, "David the Man," 232.

76. Clines, "David the Man," 222.

77. Clines, "David the Man," 222.

78. Clines, "David the Man," 223.

79. Clines, "David the Man," 223.

80. Clines, "David the Man," 225.

David's several wives and concubines; how can he be designated "womanless?" Clines clarifies, "… it is a striking feature of the David story that the males are so casual about women, and that women are so marginal to the lives of the protagonists."[81] Clines believes this tragic episode shows David's message throughout his life concerning women: Avoid them, and especially understand the "damage" sex can bring to your life.[82]

While not classifying it as an essential component of Davidic masculinity, Clines does refer to David as the "musical male."[83] The secondary feature of David comes up through the narrative of 1 and 2 Samuel. Clines does not believe that David's musical and poetic ability portrays an inherently masculine trait. He gives examples of women in the Bible making music, yet he adds that women likely lacked "the skill in playing" compared to men like David."[84] This thought leads Clines to posit that "David's kind of music, and his pre-eminence in playing it, is represented in the narrative as an essentially male trait."[85]

Clines transitions away from the social construction of gender and turns to his modern reaction. Clines does not see David as representing a "new man" or a plurality of masculinities.[86]

81. Clines, "David the Man," 225.

82. Clines, "David the Man," 226.

83. Clines, "David the Man," 227.

84. Clines, "David the Man," 228.

85. Clines, "David the Man," 228.

86. Clines, "David the Man," 228.

At first glance, David seems to act contrary to the traditional school of masculinity at the time.[87] Upon further digging, Clines believes that, in reality, David is a

> "fully-fledged traditional male, who for the most part recapitulates everything scripted for him by his culture, but now and then conspicuously fails—so conspicuously that any non-feminized reader knows immediately that it is a failure that is not to be excused or imitated, but is a sorry example that serves only to reinforce the value of the traditional norms."[88]

In other words, David's failed attempts to fit the masculine ideal actually give clarity to the reader for how an Israelite man ought to be.

Leaving the dust of Davidic Palestine, Clines turns his focus to the modern reader. What similarities are there between David's masculinity and ours? What conclusions exist from this ancestor of Christ? Clines believes there are both commonalities and differences between the David narrative and modern western masculinity. He thinks the most obvious similarity is "the modern self-definition of maleness over against femininity."[89] He then argues that men should neither be bound by culturally dictated masculine tasks nor culturally distorted characteristics.

Clines especially takes an interest in how most biblical commentaries overwhelmingly approve of David and gloss over his faults.[90] In his mind, these scholars, who are predominantly male, have participated in "gender-based hero-worship."[91] David is successful in nearly every

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87. Clines notes Joab's words in 2 Sam 19:6 when David does not think of the sacrifice of his men first, but of his rebelling son Absalom as evidence some use to prove David was seeking to establish an alternate form of masculinity over and against the hegemonic masculinity of his day (Clines, "David the Man," 228-229).

88. Clines, "David the Man," 231.

89. Clines, "David the Man," 231.

90. Clines, "David the Man," 234.

91. Clines, "David the Man," 235.

arena of life. This level of success is commonly admired in Western masculinity. His success has swallowed up all of David's grievous errors.

To conclude, Clines laments that biblical commentators have pressed their worldview upon the Davidic story. He believes this will inevitably "write the Bible out of existence."[92] He sees too many male scholars superimposing a modern masculinity conception that distorts the biblical record and makes the text as "undisturbing as possible."[93] The critical scholar's task is to remove the veils of culture and experiential knowledge to find the original text's real purpose.

Analysis of *David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible*

David Clines is a preeminent Old Testament scholar, and one can see his vast knowledge of the Hebrew language and the biblical record. Clines begins his article by inviting the reader to ponder the question every male faces: "What does it mean to be a man in (y)our own culture?"[94] This question must be answered from Scripture, and it seems like Clines is about to make such an attempt through David's story. Nevertheless, as the article goes on, the reader recognizes the misguided hermeneutic Clines uses to reach his conclusions.

92. Clines, "David the Man," 243.

93. Clines, "David the Man," 243.

94. Clines, "David the Man," 212.

95. David A. Clines, "Dancing and Shining at Sinai: Playing the Man in Exodus 32-34," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creanga (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 54.

As noted before, Clines sees gender performance in every verse of Scripture.[95] With his interpretational model in place, he believes the writer of 2 Samuel desires to portray David as the man every Israelite male wants to replicate. I would contend the opposite. If this were the case, why would the writer include the Bathsheba and Uriah account? Why would he include David's many failures as a father? If he were trying to show that being like David is the path to true masculinity, why include such an ambition's dangerous results? Sara Koenig concludes, "Rather than glorifying hegemonic masculinity, this text ends up undermining it, exposing cracks in this image of masculinity.[96] I believe she is correct. The biblical text seeks to show the contrast between the faithful man and the faithless man. It demonstrates how masculinity not centered in the Lord can lead to a destructive outcome.

There is nothing wrong with Clines' discovery of different motifs in the Davidic record. One can see David's warrior status, his skill with words, his beauty, his desire for male friendship, and even in certain respects, David's "womanless" life.[97] These can be useful descriptions, but they are not to be normative prescriptions. David's own life shows contradictions to Clines' proposition. Consider what Clines classifies as the "essential male characteristic in the David story."[98] David was not always the type to rush into war. I contend David was often a "reluctant warrior." He did not go out of his way to attack his flock's predators but remained on the defensive. He goes out to fight Goliath only after the Israelite army, including his brothers, cower in fear and avoid the confrontation. He is presented with several

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96. Sara M. Koenig, "Make War Not Love: The Limits of David's Hegemonic Masculinity in 2 Samuel 10-12," *BI* 23 (2015): 489.

97. Clines, "David the Man," 225.

98. Clines, "David the Man," 216.

opportunities to eliminate Saul and procure the kingship, but he refuses. While it is obvious that David was known for his tremendous multi-faceted military ability, he was not always dead set on being a warrior. In several of David's psalms, one can see the exhaustion of fighting and how he calls on the Lord to deliver him.[99]

The second category that I find incredibly misleading is Clines' belief that David exemplifies the "womanless male."[100] Clines says that for David, women are just political pawns, and sex is a casual event. Clines even goes so far as to say that the writer of 2 Samuel wants to display for Israelite men the evident dangers of women.[101] I do not believe David thought women to be a nuisance nor only a means for sexual release. Consider David's words in Psalm 86:16b: "Save me, because I serve you just as my mother did."[102] David never speaks in such a glowing way about his father, yet interestingly his mother's name is left unknown. Perhaps, this is because David thought so highly of her that he wanted her faith to be her defining feature.

David's heartfelt love for women was romantic as well. In 1 Samuel 25, when Abigail demonstrates her godliness even while being married to her godless husband, David seems to have an interest in her that surpasses political and sexual gain. He praises the LORD for her.[103] He gives genuine compliments for her character.[104] Finally, in 1 Samuel 25:40, David asked for

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99. Psalms 54-60 contain the repeated refrain of exhaustion and how a call for the Lord to deliver him.

100. Clines, "David the Man," 225.

101. Clines, "David the Man," 226.

102. David uses the word אֲמָתְךָ which has the second singular possessive suffix referring to the Lord. This is a compliment of the highest praise. BDB nuances this term as "referring to speaker, in token of humility." (BDB, s.v. "אָמָה.") David humbly categorizes himself and, in the process, he gives a glowing description of his godly mother.

103. 1 Sam 25:32

104. 1 Sam 25:33-34

Abigail's hand in marriage. At first glance, it seems like an impersonal proposal. After all, he sends his servants to ask her and not himself. Nevertheless, there is far more nuance to this than that. What does David stand to gain politically by marrying Abigail? Why would he make such a hasty effort to marry her during a time of turmoil in his life? Perhaps, he sent his servants to show he could offer her protection. Consider also how Abraham sent his servant to procure a wife for Isaac, which means this could be a culturally appropriate way to propose. Judging by David's profoundly emotional nature as evidenced by the tearstains in his psalms,[105] this proposal was much more than a ploy. David marvels at Abigail's faith and how she puts that faith into action. The writer of 1 Samuel gives several examples of Abigail's godliness with good reason. Every indication of the text points to David seeing her character and longing to marry her not merely due to her physical attractiveness or her effectiveness in speech.

In Clines' concluding section, his caution about speaking too highly of David is warranted. He believes that commentators have primarily given him a pass, especially in the case of Bathsheba, to which I wholeheartedly agree. What is particularly interesting about Clines' analysis of David is that the hegemonic ideal ought not to be applied at all. He began his article with the question: "What does it mean to be a man in our own culture?" but he never answers the question.[106] He speculates that David set the masculine standard in Israel, then voices his concern over commentators' handling of David, but does not address the very first question he posed. He compares David's world and ours and notes several similarities, but he seems to fall short of

105. Psalm 6:3 speaks of David's feelings of abandonment. Psalm 34:18 refers to David's feeling of being brokenhearted. A graph detailing all the emotions David shows in his psalms can be found at http://dyingtolive.org/seed-men/davids-psalms-manly-emotions/. (Jeff Krabach, "David's Psalms: Manly Emotions," *Seed Church*, 13 May 2016, http://dyingtolive.org/seed-men/davids-psalms-manly-emotions/).

106. Clines, "David the Man," 212.

making conclusive applications. Clines excellently exposes the hermeneutical problem with reading one's own culture into the biblical scene. Coincidentally, he encourages the reader to see each section of the Bible in a gender-oriented way.[107] This form of interpretation takes the text out of its proper literary context and leads to conclusions on gender that the text does not even attempt to offer. One man's description cannot set the standard for the biblical man. If this hermeneutic is applied, it would undermine the complexity of Israelite masculinity and perhaps even cloud God's own intent as the primary formulator of Israelite culture and society. Clines' form of identifying biblical masculinity continues to be the standard in the academic arena. While his initial intent may have been to shy readers away from making modern masculinity principles from biblical accounts, he nevertheless set the standard for forwarding that agenda. We see the replication of Clines' hermeneutic in current studies.

The Current Wave of Biblical Masculinity Studies

Cline's model for analyzing masculinity continues to have a significant influence today. Several significant biblical masculinity articles have been written using his structuring methodology. Susan Haddox, the chair of philosophy and religious studies at the University of Mount Union, exemplifies this in her article concerning Gideon's masculinity.[108] She concurs with Clines' thought that warfare was the dominant masculine trait in the biblical world.[109] She believes this is especially noticeable in Judges 9:54, which portrays "dying at the hand of a woman in battle

107. Clines, "Dancing and Shining at Sinai," 54.

108. Susan E. Haddox, "The Lord is with You, You Mighty Warrior": The Question of Gideon's Masculinity," *Proceedings EGLBS & MWSBL* 30 (2010).

109. Haddox, "The Lord is with You," 72.

seems to be the greatest humiliation a warrior could suffer."[110] She believes honor is another component of biblical masculinity that is tightly connected to the emphasis on warfare.[111] The honorable man desires to provide an inheritance and to protect himself and his family. She rounds out her masculine characterization with the component of persuasiveness. She references Clines in her work, and she shows the impact his article made on her reading of the Gideon account. She, like Clines, is seeking to discover broad principles concerning Hebraic masculinity from a vivid narrative. She concludes her article by remarking, "The ideals of hegemonic masculinity seem to come into conflict with those of the will of YHWH."[112] This stance is a significant deviation from Clines' thought. He would say that the biblical writers sought to portray the hegemonic male in a positive light, where here, she seems to argue the opposite.

Sara Koenig, an associate professor of biblical studies at Seattle Pacific University, seems to continue this push by Haddox. She believes that Davidic hegemony is presented not to reinforce the hegemonic masculinity in Israel but rather to reveal "cracks in this image of masculinity."[113] She agrees with Clines that David was considered an ideal man in his immediate context, and yet 2 Samuel 10-12 shows the limitations of such an idealization of masculinity.[114] She quotes Clines' comment concerning how David's story leads the male reader to be wary of entanglements with women, and she takes a different approach. In her opinion, the text does not give us the exact nature of David's sexual encounter with Bathsheba. David could have had real

110. Haddox, "The Lord is with You," 74.

111. Haddox, "The Lord is with You," 74.

112. Haddox, "The Lord is with You," 87.

113. Koenig, "Make War Not Love," 489.

114. Koenig, "Make War Not Love," 491.

romantic feelings for Bathsheba, and this account is purposely set in contrast to Amnon's sexual assault of Tamar. While she admits this is highly unlikely, she seems to indicate that Clines goes a little too far in his "womanless" component of biblical hegemonic masculinity. An exciting twist she adds to the conversation is David's relationship with Yahweh. Cline does not directly address this issue. In her mindset, the Davidic account "points to a limit of hegemonic masculinity within the Hebrew Bible, where Yahweh is the ultimate rule-maker who steps in when humans break those rules."[115] In other words, the emphasis of the text could be centering on how the Lord is far different from the dominant masculine cultural construct. Strikingly, at the conclusion of her article, she references explicitly the wrong-headed approach of *Wild at Heart*, which will be examined later in this thesis, of modeling modern masculinity by David's characteristics.

The clearest indicator of Clines' enduring pull in the field of biblical masculinity studies comes from an article from 2019 by Jon-Michael Carman. He adopts a modified version of Clines' model of masculinity and calls Clines' model "the starting point for modeling masculinity in the Hebrew Bible."[116] Using each of Cline's components, Carman analyzes the portrayal of Abimelech's masculinity in the Judges narrative.

The most enduring testament to Clines' sway in this field is the volume entitled *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*. Clines, who was the primary driver of compiling this project,[117] calls this "the first of its kind in being focused on the construction and

115. Koenig, "Make War Not Love," 507.

116. Carmen, "Abimelech the Manly Man?," 305.

117. Ovidiu Creanga, "Preface," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creanga (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), vii-viii.

representation of masculinity in the Hebrew Bible."[118] This book continues to be an authoritative work in the field, even though it has been a decade since it was first published.

The Implications of Clines' Model for Ascertaining Biblical Masculinity

Clines' model can be extremely beneficial for furthering one's understanding of different male figures in the Bible. However, one cannot make the jump that such descriptions set the standard for how the Israelite culture viewed masculinity. Furthermore, it is a dangerous proposition to hint at contemporary applications from these biblical narratives. As we will discuss when we address legalism, such renderings of masculinity can lead the male reader to a crisis and deep confusion concerning what the Bible teaches about manhood's essential qualities.

Summary of *Wild at Heart: Discovering The Secret of a Man's Soul*

Moving from academia to the world of everyday American men, we must recognize and analyze what has become one of the definitive texts of American evangelical books on masculinity.[119] As I summarize his book, it is important to acknowledge that there is much truth to what Eldredge writes. The critical problem is that this truth is mixed in with faulty exegesis and conjecture. I will be focusing primarily on the bold and subtle misconceptions he has about Christian masculinity.

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118. Clines, "David the Man," 234.

119. This is "evangelical" in the sense of the ideology of American Evangelicalism as defined in the first footnote.

John Eldredge sees Christian masculinity in an identity crisis. At the beginning of his book, Eldredge encourages men to run to the wilderness to find their hearts.[120] He quotes a portion of Proverbs 20:5 from the NKJV, which reads, "The heart of a man is like deep water." It is up to each man to find his true masculine soul.

He believes the creation account of the first man indicates the wild nature of men.[121] He sees Adam being formed in the wilderness as evidence that men are essentially wild by nature. In other words, "Men are born in the outback, from the untamed part of creation."[122] He looks not only to the origination of masculinity but also to biblical men like Moses, Jacob, Elijah, John the Baptizer, and even Jesus to show how men must be called from the wild to be wild.[123] This foundational point sets Eldredge up for his often-used complaint that Christianity today has made men think that "God put them on earth to be a good boy."[124] He sees the Christian man in the pews today as merely "dutiful" and "separated from his heart."[125] Men need to be reinvigorated, and for that to happen, Eldredge asks the question, "What makes you come alive?"[126]

120. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 3.

121. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 3-4.

122. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 3-4.

123. He talks about how Moses was called in the wilderness by the burning bush and "not in a mall." Jacob wrestled with God "not on the living room sofa" but in the wilderness. Elijah went to the wilderness to be re-energized. John the Baptizer's ministry was in the wilderness and Jesus was "led by the Spirit" into the wilderness (Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 5).

124. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 5.

125. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 5.

126. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 9.

A man must look within himself and find where his true passions lie. He must discover both what makes his own life essential to the world and the meaning for which God created him.[127]

According to Eldredge, there are three essential components of being a man: A battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue. These are all subjective to the individual man, but from the countless conversations he has shared with men, he believes these longings to be "universal."[128] So what is the idea behind the battle a man must fight? First and foremost, it is a heart desiring to be a hero. One of Eldredge's common word pictures is the contrast between Mr. Rogers and Braveheart.[129] What man would rather be Mr. Rogers when he is built to be a warrior like Braveheart? A man is designed to be a fighter, but before he can fight, he must answer the question, "Where do (I) come from?"[130]

A man should be "invited to be dangerous."[131] "If a boy is to become a man … he has to know where he comes from and what he's made of."[132] Using the cultural reference to Braveheart, he sees Jesus from a militaristic standpoint as he confronts his enemies. Eldredge writes, "Christ draws the enemy out, exposes him for what he is, and shames him in front of

127. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 9.

128. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 9.

129. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 22, 35.

130. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 21.

131. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 21.

132. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 21.

everyone."[133] God is in a battle for our freedom.[134] If God's heart is fierce, then men must have the same fierceness to fight.[135]

In Eldredge's mind, God shows this fierceness by calling his "wild" creation "good."[136] He articulates that God continues to allow this "wildness" to endure in the modern world. God is not a chess-player "playing both sides of the board."[137] God is a risk-taker.[138] Eldredge believes that God is riskier than most theologians are willing to admit, but he specifically mentions that he does not advocate "open theism."[139] However, he refuses to back down from his position that there is something wild in the heart of God.[140] God relishes risks and loves to "come through."[141] The masculine soul desires this same drive for those he loves.

The problem for men in Eldredge's mind is that they have no battle to fight.[142] Battle and adventure have been replaced by "pencils and cubicles."[143] Men are going through the motions of a soul-draining life. As the line from Braveheart puts it, "All men die; few men ever really

133. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 25.

134. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 25.

135. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 26.

136. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 30.

137. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 30.

138. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 31.

139. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 32.

140. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 32.

141. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 32.

142. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 41.

143. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 42.

live."[144] He believes the reason this tragedy is happening revolves around men's greatest fear: exposure.[145] No man wants to be discovered to be an imposter of masculinity. He fears that someone will sense he does not have what it takes.

Why do men have this innate sense to discover their status, and why do men hide emotion when they feel like they have not achieved their status or purpose? Eldredge believes it comes down to the ultimate question every man must answer: "Do I have what it takes?"[146] Until a man experiences the answer to that question, a wound is inflicted upon him that alters his very life perspective. It affects his relationship with women and with emotional health. He "craves" to truly feel masculine.[147]

How does a man find healing to his wound? He must have a battle to fight that brings out his true masculine spirit. Eldredge does not think society-at-large is doing men any favors in this endeavor. Quoting Robert Bly, he writes, "We know our society produces a plentiful supply of boys, but seems to produce fewer and fewer men."[148] Men are given strength and power by nature, but the modern man is called to avoid using his God-given strength. As a boy, he is called "over-active," and as a man, he is told to "be soft."[149] Men long to be heroes, and yet Eldredge laments that American society does not allow him to do so.

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144. Quoted on page 41 of *Wild at Heart*. I was unable to find the primary source for the quote.

145. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 45.

146. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 62.

147. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 66.

148. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 82.

149. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 82.

Eldredge sees the church as a failure when it comes to addressing this issue. The church cares more about morality. He writes, "Morality is a good thing, but morality is never the point."[150] Men are designed for so much more, and it is God who reveals a man's specific purpose. Each man must embark on their own "calling out" journey with God.

In contrast, our culture promotes the idea that a man must intensely commit to "living in a way where we do not have to depend on anyone – especially God."[151] Christianity is not merely self-help but a healing from the Lord.[152] A man must "invite Jesus into the wound, we ask him to come and meet us there, to enter into the broken and unhealed places of our heart."[153] We must "let God love us; we let him get real close to us."[154] This is the releasing of self that leads a man to see his true identity, namely, the man God had in mind when he made him.[155] Only after this identity revelation can a man indeed be armed for the battle he must fight.

Satan is desperate to search and destroy the hearts of men. His strategies include disrupting communication between Christians,[156] filling our minds with sinful propaganda,[157]

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150. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 101.

151. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 121.

152. The Christian life is also repentance, being crucified and rising with Christ. Many who focus on healing cannot see past it. Our sinfulness is a more fundamental truth about us than our being wounded. We meet Jesus first as Savior. Healing is an aspect of sanctification that will remain incomplete while we are sinner-saints.

153. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 128.

154. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 130.

155. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 134.

156. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 160.

157. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 162.

and exploiting men's weaknesses.[158] Eldredge calls men to fight, "Stand on what is true and do not let go."[159] It is when we stand on Scripture, knowing God's warrior nature, that we will stand tall against the Evil One.[160]

Eldredge commences the final section of his book with a personal story of cliff jumping and how in that moment of the freefall, he realized how he wants to live his life: "I want to live my whole life like that. I want to live with much more abandon and stop waiting for others to love me first. I want to … pray from my heart's true desire."[161] It is when a man's heart is set on God, and he hears him not only through the Bible but through personal experience and culture, that he is ready to live a genuinely wild life.[162] He gives his personal story of the risks he took and how the Lord blessed his efforts. He laments how "most men spend the energy of their lives trying to eliminate risk, or squeezing it down to a more manageable size."[163] A man must not ask what does the world need; instead, "What makes you come alive because what the world needs are men who have come alive."[164] To discover this true living self, a man "needs to get away from the noise and distraction of his daily life … He needs to head into the wilderness."[165] He must discover the mystery he intends to explore.

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158. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 163.

159. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 164.

160. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 168

161. Eldredge often begins each chapter with a personal experience that connects to the thought he is about to explicate. Note the following pages for examples: 2-3; 20-21; 40-41; 78-79 et al.

162. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 200-201.

163. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 203.

164. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 206.

165. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 207.

The place to find this mystery is in a man's "uniqueness."[166] He must personally answer the questions God has posed to him, "What are you asking me to do?" and "What in my heart are you speaking to?" If a man commits to the daily discovery of these questions, he begins his journey to be truly wild at heart.

Analysis of *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul*

As any of Clines' readers can feel, one can feel the compassionate heart of Eldredge. He looks at the state of American Christian masculinity, and he reveals a void needing to be filled. He perceives that the average Christian man in America is bored and living an unfulfilled life.[167] He has a substantial grasp on the struggles many men in the church are facing. He puts into words the silence men are facing at the hands of Satan and his worldly voices.[168] The questions he poses are crucial for a man to answer; however, the answers he offers can very easily lead a man away from uncovering the answers he longs to know. Eldredge desires for men to see the freedom and wildness that is innate to their nature. He wants men to "live from the heart and not from the lift of "should" and "ought to" that has left so many of us tired and bored."[169] Unfortunately, the mantra of "should" and "ought to" becomes the resounding refrain of his take on masculinity.[170]

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166. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 213.

167. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 7.

168. Larry Crabb, *The Silence of Adam: Becoming Men of Courage in a World of Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 12.

169. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, xi.

170. On page 46, note the "should," "need," "have to" variations.

Eldredge repeatedly calls men to embark on their adventure to find their purpose with passion. While this can be a noble encouragement, Eldredge's use of Scripture in this encouragement is questionable. The second verse he quotes in *Wild at Heart* is Proverbs 20:5. Using the NKJV translation, he writes, "The heart of a man is like deep water." This phrase is found in this verse, but it is within a prepositional phrase. The whole verse in the NKJV reads, "*Counsel* (emphasis mine) in the heart of a man is like deep water."[171] I can understand why Eldredge quotes the section he does. It clues the reader into his recurring thesis statement: Decipher the natural motivations and wildness of your heart, follow them, and you will find fulfillment and freedom. To prove this point, he takes Scripture out of context and tailors it for his own gain. Proverbs 20:5 is not instructing men to descend the depths of their hearts to blaze their life perspective. Proverbs 1:7 disproves that entirely.[172] Real wisdom in a man's life can only come through the Lord's instruction and calling through the Scriptures. Eldredge "change(s) and misrepresent(s) the meaning of the text" in Proverbs.[173] He then takes the fateful step of not only misquoting Scripture but building his entire argument based on faulty exegesis. He takes passages out of their proper context and misapplies them to masculinity.

This misinterpretation issue flares up again as he takes the reader back to the Garden of Eden, where God created masculinity with his own hands. He speculates that since Adam was

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171. The Hebrew reads: מַ֥יִם עֲמֻקִּ֗ים עֵצָ֥ה בְלֵב־אִ֫ישׁ וְאִישׁ תְּבוּנָ֥ה יִדְלֶ֑נָּה The word for "man" here certainly refers to both genders. The NIV translates the word as "person." The word translated "counsel" by the NJKV seems to be more likely the idea of "purpose." We will address the issue of masculinity's purpose in the latter portion of this writing.

172. Proverbs 1:7 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

173. Daryl Wingerd, "A Critical Review of John Eldredge's Wild at Heart," *Christian Communicators Worldwide*, 4 October 2010, https://www.ccwtoday.org/2010/04/a-critical-review-of-john-eldlredges-wild-at-heart/.

created in the wilderness, men are by nature wild and must return to this wildness frequently.[174] This argument cannot coexist with the biblical record. Adam did not feel complete until he was brought to the Garden and given his perfect complementary partner.[175] It was after he saw his "bone of bones" and "flesh of flesh" that God gave him joy and fulfillment. Besides, if it is true that Yahweh designed Adam for the wilderness environment, he "would have cursed Adam before he sinned."[176] Adam would have been confined to a location that contradicted his very being. It would then be a lie when Genesis describes the opening chapter of human history as "very good."[177] Eldredge's willingness to run ahead of the Scriptures is unfortunate.[178] However, this is not the only danger he presents.

In his book, Eldredge draws numerous conclusions from Scripture, but more often than not, his assertions are based on cultural references and personal experiences.[179] This appeal to non-scriptural sources is not uncommon in evangelical literature. As Gallagher and Wood note, "Much evangelical advice literature appeals as frequently to personal experience and popular culture as to the Bible. *Wild at Heart* typifies this approach."[180] He sets up a hypothetical power match between a spirit of Braveheart and a spirit of Mr. Rogers and asks men which they would rather be. It is as if being a "nice guy" is equated with an emasculated one. A Christian man sees

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174. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 3-4.

175. Gen 2

176. Wingerd, "A Critical Review of John Eldredge's Wild at Heart." https://www.ccwtoday.org/2010/04/a-critical-review-of-john-eldredges-wild-at-heart/.

177. Gen 1:31

178. 2 John 1:9

179. Of his direct quotations: 108 are from Scripture, 136 are cultural references from movies and literature of some sort, and 56 are from his own personal encounters.

180. Gallagher and Wood, "Godly Manhood Going Wild," 142.

the pop culture around him and how he cannot measure up. He feels the agony of inadequacy in his heart. By instructing men, implicitly and explicitly, to search in all the wrong places for their purpose, Eldredge leads men, not to their fulfillment but their detriment.[181]

What is especially alarming is how Eldredge not only calls men to adhere to their inner riskiness but that God himself is risk personified.[182] While Eldredge denies he is an open theist, the concept of God's wildness is essential to his construction of masculinity.[183] If the future is in any way "wild," and God is a proponent of risk, he has lost his complete control over the universe. If the fortunes of history hinge on human beings, then God is a mere master predictor of events. For a struggling and confused Christian man, God becomes not the only lasting certainty but a deity who revels in the ambiguous. This stance on God's risky temperament provides the launching to Eldredge's "re-articulation of the nineteenth-century myth of the self-made man."[184] He counters the masculinity ideology of *Focus on the Family Ministries* and returns to a similar ideology to Muscular Christianity.

181. Psalm 62:1 makes clear that a person can only find rest in God alone. Augustine in his Confessions wrote, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." (Augustine, *Confessions* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 18).

182. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 31.

183. His comments on open theism are found on page 32. Open theism is the argument that God knows all future possibilities, but not future events *in concreto*. Because God has a perfect knowledge of the past, he can make incredibly accurate predictions of the future. This then removes the seeming contradiction between God's omniscience and the free will of human beings. However, this teaching does not fall in line with the clear truth of Scripture. As Peter says in John 21:17, the Lord "knows all things." This includes future events.

184. Gallagher and Wood, "Godly Manhood Going Wild," 135.

He accomplishes this in large part through the repeated use of Robert Bly.[185] Bly proposes that men ought to look to masculine images of the past to combat American society's increasing feminization.[186] Bly longs for men never to give up the goal of progress and to "have a higher consciousness than their fathers."[187] Bly contends that there is an inner struggle within a man that seeks to impede his personal journey and must be combatted.[188] Eldredge takes up this battle imagery and describes the consequential results. Contrary to the Promise Keeper's movement, which centered predominantly on the Christian man's roles as husband and father, Eldredge calls for a man to find a purpose beyond the home. Going deeper, he wants the Christian man to abandon his fear of the unknown and his desire for security. Why? So that his true person and name can be revealed.[189] Once again, we find where the burden of establishing an identity to live with is placed: Upon the man himself. He must be a warrior, and he must fight the battle for his soul, his beauty, and his adventure.[190] If God does not hold the future entirely, the pressure is on the individual man. He is presented once again with the questions that started it all: "Do I have what it takes?" "Can I truly be a warrior after God's own heart?" Men close *Wild*

185. Bly is considered the chief proponent of the mythopoetic men's movement. The basic thrust of this movement in the 1980s's and 1990's was derived largely from Jungian psychology, "from which the use of myths and fairy tales taken from various cultures served as ways to interpret challenges facing men in society. (Joseph Gelfer, *Numen, Old Men: Contemporary Masculine Spiritualities and the Problem of Patriarchy* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2014), 16).

186. His book *Iron John: A Book About Men* spent 62 weeks on The New York Times Best Seller list. Bly believed that the fairy tale of Iron John contained lessons from the past of great importance to modern men, which could provide positive images of masculinity, such as that of Zeus. He considered Iron John to be an archetype of the Self, and the hero's interactions with him to represent a katabasis, or exploratory journey into the inner depths, where new sources of positive masculine sexuality could be found and tapped. For a clear example of his ideology see Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men*, (Indianapolis: Dorset, 1991) 223-239.

187. Bly, *Iron John*, 101.

188. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 83.

189. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 87-88.

190. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 10.

at Heart with two possible answers. One answer is the shout of the self-righteous man who claims true masculinity in and of himself. The other is the quiet submission of the despairing man who knows he will never measure up.

The Current Wave of Popular Christian Masculinity Books

While the spirit of *Wild at Heart* is still prevalent in America today,[191] there is a noticeable shift in recent evangelical books regarding masculinity. While Eldredge emphasizes the self-made man, Nate Pyle believes men must intentionally choose "to be vulnerable."[192] Men in their various calling cannot expect to find their strength from within; instead, in Christ, a man is man enough.[193] Pyle pivots from "rugged individualism" to a "community of grace and truth."[194] Men are built for interdependence on especially the Lord, but also his fellow Christian brothers and sisters.

Eric Mason views masculinity in a similar portrait, "Until we get past this kind of destructive individualism, we won't be able to embrace the kind of interest sacrificing following Jesus calls us to."[195] Jesus does not call men to find within their hearts what their purpose is. The

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191. Jerry Falwell, Jr., president of the largest Christian university in the world, tweeted that "Christians need to stop electing nice guys" and support "street fighters like Donald Trump at every level of government." 57twitter.com/jerryfalwelljr/status/104585333007798272?lang=en.) 2.This context is one in which two out of five Americans think the country has become "too soft and feminine." (Robert P. Jones and Daniel Cox, "Two-thirds of Trump Supporters Say Nation Needs a Leader Willing to Break the Rules: PRRI/The Atlantic Survey," *Public Religion Research Institute*, 2016, prri.org/research/prri-atlantic-poll-republican-democratic-primary-trump-supporters).

192. Nate Pyle, *Man Enough: How Jesus Redefines Manhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 193.

193. Pyle, *Man Enough*, 191.

194. Pyle, *Man Enough*, 26.

195. Eric Mason, *Manhood Restored: How the Gospel Makes Men Whole* (Nashville: B&H, 2013), 75.

"Restorer of Manhood" takes the redeemed man and leads us to follow in his example.[196] The truly masculine man points again and again to Christ in all he does. He is a man who revels in being described as a man "restored by grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone."[197]

Marcus Simmons adds to this Christ-centered chorus when he writes, "You are a picture of God's version of masculinity. No longer bound by society's definitions of what a man should be or should not be. Your masculine identity is now defined by God's Word."[198] Using his life story as the narrative vehicle, Simmons alerts men to the dangers of self-created purpose. It was not until he learned how to "surrender" that Simmons discovered a masculinity that was toxic neither to himself nor to his varying communities.[199] *Wild at Heart* may still be a bestseller; yet, more and more voices are signaling the tantalizing possibility that the Lord has much more in mind for men. He calls us to learn the ramifications of our Christ-bought freedom.

Reaction to this New Literary Wave

These more recent evangelical books on masculinity properly showcase how Christ must be at the center of the Christian man's life. All three authors recognize that no definition of masculinity can equally apply to every man. The Christian man has been freed and called to be like Christ. They are called to be fully human and love every person in their walk of life with unconditional compassion.

196. Mason, *Manhood Restored*, 67.

197. Mason, *Manhood Restored*, 187.

198. Marcus M. Simmons, *Unapologetically Masculine: Masculinity Without Toxicity* (Independently Published, 2019), 95.

199. Simmons, *Unapologetically Masculine*, 73.

While this emphasis is faithful to Scripture, these authors do not point the hearts of Christian men to some of the most crucial means by which Christians can be strengthened in their goal to be like Christ. While there is mention of the power of baptism, those mentions are scarce.[200] Baptism remakes every Christian man. He becomes a son of God and a brother of Christ. This deepest of relationships empowers the Christian man in every vocation by which he worships his Savior. In addition, not a single author mentions the restorative and emboldening sacrament of the Lord's Supper. When the Christian man recognizes how often he has connected his inmost being on the paradigm of culture and societal conceptions of masculinity, he runs to the altar to receive the body and blood of the Man of men. He tastes forgiveness for his misguided masculine heart, and he walks through the various doors of his life with this lasting flavor of joy. The means of grace deserve a more central place in the Christian man's life. We must return to the means of grace in our discussion on the relationship between Christian freedom and masculinity.

Motif Connections between Clines and Eldredge

Both Clines and Eldredge see the warrior component in biblical masculinity as the primary characteristic. A man must be a fighter. Such a belief has an unscriptural foundation. One need only look at the first man in history to see this. In the beginning, Adam had no battle to fight. He had a tremendous calling from his creator to cultivate this marvelous world. He was called not to be a warrior but a "good steward."[201] In this state of perfection, it was not a fight he longed for

200. Pyle, *Man Enough*, 143.

201. Pyle, *Man Enough*, 191.

but a companion. His reaction to seeing Eve for the first time led him to pour forth the first love poetry ever composed. Women are more than beauties to be rescued. Masculinity has always been relational. In fact, Adam did not feel whole until the Lord brought Eve into his life. God has a beautiful plan for how masculinity is designed to respond to femininity.

Consequently, if men are essentially warriors, then what joy is heaven? Heaven is a place of eternal bliss and everlasting peace.[202] If a man's primary drive is a warrior's instinct, would this not make heaven an "unmanly" place? The Christian man is forced into battle every day by Satan, the world's destructive influences, and his sinful flesh. Men and women alike are reluctant warriors. We are warriors ready for Jesus to take the sword from our hands and place a crown of life on our heads.

202. Rev 21:4

PART III: MASCULINITY LIBERATED FOR SELF-SACRIFICE

The Pervading Legalism Surrounding Masculinity Conceptualization

Christian men have long been instructed in the "biblical conceptualization" of masculinity (Clines) and the battle they must fight within (Eldredge), yet in all this, notice what is lacking: the gospel. Without an appeal to the gospel, the Christian man is inevitably harassed by a spirit of legalism. He feels pressured to appeal to the law to find meaning and purpose for his existence. J.P Koehler defined this dangerous legalism in this way, "Legalism sets aside the proper source of the Christian life, namely the gospel, and devotes itself to the law, which is not at all intended by God as a source of the new life."[203] A legalistic definition of masculinity perverts God's goal for Christian men. It gives the Christian man nothing but a "mind bound up in the law."[204] If men are forced to live under that cloud of legalism, the trail will be "mechanical, external, afflicted with mental reservations and secondary objectives, calculated for the moment, ungenuine, and untruthful."[205] A man fraternizes with pharisees when he places all the pressure to prove his value on his own intellect. Legalism is the path a man takes when he places his sin-clouded heart in the driver's seat to validate that he is in fact, truly masculine. Legalism occurs when a man looks to culture to learn how to prove himself instead of looking to the gospel, which ends this obsession with validation. If a man seeks his own path to the discovery of identity, he will fall under the mastery of either pride or despair. Men lose sight of the Pioneer and Trailblazer of Christian masculinity and turn to the inner darkness of their

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203. J.P. Koehler, "Legalism among Us" (*Gesetzlich Wesen unter uns*), in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, ed. Curtis A. Jahn (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1997), 2: 235.

204. Koehler, "Legalism among us," 249. The German phrase *gesetzlicher Sinn* can also be translated "a legalistic spirit."

205. Koehler, "Legalism among Us," 235.

corroded human hearts.[206] The writings of Clines and Eldredge we examined inevitably will lead men to identity confusion and ill-conceived servanthood to a destructive master.

Clines' model does this more subtly and dangerously. By attempting to construct Israelite masculinity based on one sinner-saint, Clines tarnishes the Lord's intentions for masculinity. Such an attempt has the "limitations of generalization that inevitably characterizes this portraiture of biblical man."[207] Clines' principle of seeing gender in every verse of Scripture cannot help but lead the modern man to compare himself to various biblical men. Men must look away from the sinner-saints of Scripture. They must look to their Lord. The picture of Christian masculinity must be framed by the selfless sacrifice of Jesus. By faith, the Christian man cannot look away from the greatest Man in history. He stands at the foot of the cross through the Word and lives his life motivated by the most freeing sentence ever spoken: "It is finished!"[208]

Eldredge directs the Christian man to let his inner voice reveal his true self. From there, he points him to certain ideals drawn from popular culture. He puts on the mask of a biblical literalist yet appeals, as has been shown, "as frequently to personal experience and popular culture as to the Bible."[209] Does this not sow seeds of confusion in the mind of the Christian man? Is the Bible just a re-statement of how a man's culture already makes him feel about his masculinity? Eldredge, taking many themes from the "self-made man" of the Muscular Christianity movement, presents the Christian man, not as one freed by Christ to live a life of

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206. Heb 12:2

207. Ovidiu Creanga, "Variations on the Theme of Masculinity: Joshua's Gender In/stability in the Conquest Narrative (Josh. 1-12), In *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creanga (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 87.

208. John 19:30

209. Gallagher and Wood, "Godly Manhood Going Wild," 142.

joyful self-sacrifice, but as one who on his own "must get (his) heart back."[210] Where is the focus? The onus of discovering identity and purpose is placed on the back of a man who already finds himself lost in his own confused psyche.[211] Eldredge does not focus on the objective truth of Christ's self-sacrifice. Instead, his call for the man to be "wild" leads a man to a manic waving of the chains of crisis, all the while thinking he is free.

So, where can true freedom be found for the Christian man? How can a man know that he is truly masculine in God's eyes? The answer cannot be found in what conclusions we may draw from a sinner-saint or the sinful heart. The Son of Man restores a man's soul. He gives men and women the only true freedom in this life. Through faith in Christ's ultimate sacrifice, Christian men and women walk into a new existence of freedom and enter an entirely new way of life.

Ephesians 5: Christ-Inspired Self-Sacrifice

Where, then, can the Christian man find the true expression of masculinity? He must look to the primary *sedes* of Scripture where masculinity finds its fulfillment: Ephesians 5. In the opening two verses of the chapter, Paul exhorts, "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." The category of love Paul speaks of here is αγάπη.[212] This word for love is found in only four writings outside of Scripture.[213] Its meaning is not in the

210. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 18.

211. The Lord says as much in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

212. BDAG states that this word "denotes concern for the other." (BDAG, s.v. "ἀγάπη.")

213. Haddon W. Robinson, "Two Traits of Agape Love," *JEHS* 15 (2015): 61.

realm of emotions but the realm of the will. Haddon Robinson aptly defines αγάπη as the love that "determines that it will seek the highest good for other people."[214] It is the sacrifice of self-interest for the gain of another.

The concept of sacrifice has always been a foundational element of Christian living. Even the atheist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche realized that "the Christian faith is from the beginning a sacrifice."[215] Consequently, this word, "sacrifice," becomes the literary theme of a Christian man's life. Now, it must be stated that this is an encouragement for all believers, men and women. However, as we will see later in this vital chapter, the focus of self-sacrifice narrows to men specifically.

In Ephesians 5:25, Paul writes a sentence that overtly "stood against the traditions of its day."[216] "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." He does not call husbands to Stoicism but the emulation of Jesus. This section of Scripture does not depict a bridal mystic union within each believer. Paul calls men to love their wives after the same pattern of Jesus' love.[217] "Christ's sacrificial act is not only a model for the Christian man to adhere to but also the source of the husband's love."[218] Christ reveals that masculinity is not about adapting to the voice of culture or the inner voice of self but marveling and reacting to Jesus' self-sacrifice. Christ's eternally impacting self-sacrifice empowers the man

214. Robinson, "Two Traits of Agape Love," 61.

215. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 60-61.

216. Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 70.

217. F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 386.

218. Thomas M. Winger, *Ephesians*, CC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 609.

to recognize and revel in his calling to give up self. The mind of the believing man "does not recognize the absence of selfishness in the life of the Spirit."[219] The Christian man is called to a "radical servanthood (of) gentleness, humility, sacrifice, and love."[220]

As Paul walks through the callings for each family member, he makes an emphatic three-fold appeal to the ancient paterfamilias for cruciform self-sacrificial love, Lord-centered parenting, and service of slaves. In this way, he "balances out his appeal and indicates that mutual submission is in fact mutual service."[221] Paul gives both men and women the goal for their respective sexes. As for husbands, in particular, he instructs them to look at Christ. Men have always held the vast majority of power. Nevertheless, the Bible calls men to sacrifice their interests for the interests of others. God calls a man not to sacrifice self when the necessity arises but to willingly give up himself to serve God and his fellow human beings. This calling is not empowered by the law but the gospel in Word and Sacrament. The Christian man follows the way of Christ-centered self-sacrifice because "whoever loses their life for (Christ) will find it."[222] The self-sacrificing man has a kind of liberty unlike any other. He has the freedom to serve without restraint.

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219. J.P. Koehler, *A Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2000), 453.

220. Keown, "Paul's Vision of a New Masculinity," 60. Although Keown rightfully identifies that the Christian man ought to pattern his life after Christ, he makes no mention of either the sinner-saint struggle or the necessity of the means of grace. Such an encouragement to godly living is crucial, but without the motivation of the gospel, a man will feel nothing but burdens.

221. Keown, "Paul's Vision of a New Masculinity," 59.

222. Matt 16:25

Yet, Christian men will always remain *simul justus et peccator* this side of eternity.[223] Satan and our flesh will labor tirelessly to distract us from the means of grace. The forces of evil in this world want every man to exert his power to belittle others and exalt self. These powers hold no weight with the Word of God and his instituted Sacraments. The Christian man, in moments of failure, has far more than self-pity. He clutches the simple words *Ego baptizatus sum*, "I am baptized!" He has been forgiven, and he has a new life in his Savior. As he looks to follow the self-sacrificing mode of life, he kneels at the altar as Jesus renews his heart through the giving of his own body and blood. He can know his freedom is not lost. His calling has not been revoked. He is empowered to move forward with Christ at the fore.

1 Corinthians 7: Christian Freedom by Slavery to Christ

In a similar progression as in Ephesians 5, Paul addresses several common life callings in 1 Corinthians 7. He once again gives a countercultural imperative to men.[224] He addresses women and slaves, as well. However, he then speaks to a segment of society not specifically mentioned in Ephesians 5: the single and unmarried.[225] He encourages them to "live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord."[226] Ephesians 5 sets Christ's sacrificial love as the goal for masculinity, and here Paul includes the single man in this calling. An "undivided devotion" to

223. "At the same time saint and sinner." This is the thoroughly Lutheran teaching of sanctification. The Christian knows himself in two ways, as a sinner through and through, and as a child of God. The Christian will never become entirely perfect in his life of sanctification. He will always have the sinful nature dogging him. Yet, the Spirit renews him and makes him more like Christ as he runs to the means of grace (the gospel in Word and Sacrament).

224. 1 Cor 7:4: "The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife."

225. 1 Cor 7:8-9, 25-28

226. 1 Cor 7:35

the Lord leads the faithful man to set aside self-interest. This man is called away from divided interests but to a solitary one. He is freed from the tugging and pulling of the pressures of self and world to walk in the freedom won for him. The Christian man is not called to give up the God-given passions he has, but to give up his self-prescribed purpose and attach himself to Jesus and his purpose for him. Scripture does not instruct the Christian man to give up the very gifts the Lord has blessed him with, but "live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned."[227] The man whose heart was won by the God who never stopped running after him is free and is "Christ's slave."[228] This is the freedom the Lord has always intended for men. Even as men struggle with the devil's aims to put their souls back in slavery to sin, Jesus holds out his blood-bought freedom for them day after day through Word and Sacrament.

This freedom of sacrifice is naturally accompanied by servanthood. This paradox is what Christian freedom is all about. This truth is what the Christian man gets to contemplate and put into practice his entire life long. The Christian man is both a slave and a free person. This statement would have appalled most people in Paul's day. Just as in Ephesians 5, Paul shows that he "does not take his standards from the culture but from the word of his Lord."[229] Why would anyone, especially a free man, want to tie himself to the term "slave?" He longs to do so because he knows the freedom of self-sacrifice rooted in Christ. John Chrysostom said it this way: "When is the one who is a slave not a slave? When he does everything for the sake of God, when he acts without pretense and not with eye-service of men. This is to be free, even while serving human

227. 1 Cor 7:17

228. 1 Cor 7:22

229. Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, NIC (Ada, MI: Baker, 1993), 222.

masters."[230] The Christian man has a new identity given by the Lord. His new identity "may require the death of certain identities."[231] However, this death leads to a further glorification of God. In his classic *The Freedom of the Christian*, Martin Luther reveals the beautiful paradox of a believer's identity, "The Christian is a slave of all and subject to all. Insofar as a Christian is free, he or she does nothing; insofar as the Christian is a slave, he or she does all things."[232] The Christian man is not autonomous. He does not make up the ruling principle of his life on his own. He is free not to be his own master, which is self-inflicted slavery.

This self-infliction is often the tactic of choice by the father of lies himself. "The right to be 'free' has become our consummate cultural cliché."[233] A man's emancipation "does not consist in (his) correcting (his) ways of thinking."[234] His freedom exists because he has a new Master. Jesus designed the Christian man not to be energized by self but empowered by the Lord.[235]

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230. John Chrysostom, "Homilies on 1 Corinthians," in *1 Corinthians: Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators*, ed. Judith L. Kovacs (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 119.

231. Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), 72.

232.Martin Luther, "The Freedom of the Christian" (1520): vol. 31, p. 374, in *Luther's Works*, vols. 31-55, ed. Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957 86).

233. Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), 66.

234. Otto Weber, "Christian Freedom and Autonomous Man," *CrossCurrents* 5 (1955), 146.

235. CS Lewis in *Mere Christianity* put it like this: What Satan put into the heads of our remote ancestors was the idea that they could 'be like gods'—could set up on their own as if they had created themselves—be their own masters—invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, apart from God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery—the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy. The reason why it can never succeed is this. God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 53-54).

This God-given empowerment leads the Christian man to realize the "transference of ownership" in his life.[236] Neither his job nor his interests nor his social status play a role in his standing before God. It is the spiritual freedom, won for him by Jesus, that is meant to direct his every motive and intention. The Christian man is not alone in this journey. He has Jesus making a home in his heart. This mystic union is the real union of Jesus and the individual believer. The Christian man lives unabashedly under the banner entitled "A sinner saved by grace alone." This statement is not the "big lie" of the church but the true story of the Christian life. This biography encapsulates the one big truth of a man's new lease on life. The Christian man sees his inadequacies and failures. He tears up as he recalls the moments he has not lived up to the standard of Christ. However, as he reads of his freedom won for him by the self-sacrifice of his Brother, he realizes the answer to that long-asked question: "Do I have what it takes?" He experiences the thrill of joy as he lives "his whole life … in lowly service to his Master."[237]

When a man recognizes his unique call to lose himself in his quest for self-sacrifice, he will marvel at the revealing of genuine love. Terry Eagleton put it this way, "To accept a self-divestment … is to seize the chance to convert it into the alternative self-abandonment of love."[238] The freedom of the Christian man can be observed as he excitedly puts aside his own ambition for the ultimate good of those he is responsible to serve.[239] This vocation is not dressed in the broad phylacteries and long tassels of pharisaic legalism. For the emancipated cross-bearer, his motivation is not self-centered but God-centered. His heart says, "I will do this thing

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236. Gregory J. Lockwood, *First Corinthians*, CC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 249.

237. Leon Morris, *First Corinthians*, TNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 111.

238. Terry Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice* (Padstow: TJ International, 2018), 38-39.

239. Kristopher Norris, "Toxic Masculinity and the Quest for Ecclesial Legitimation," *JSCE* 39 (2019): 332-333.

because I love God, and I want to please him."[240] His mind dictates, "My freedom gives me license not to sin, but to serve." This realization opens the door of endless possibilities for a man to serve God. Because he has been freed, his culture has no right to define him differently from how his Lord has done so. His freedom impacts every segment of his life.

Christian freedom through and through is relational. Biblically defined freedom is not self-independence but satisfying interdependence. The free man becomes deeply embedded in every relationship he has. He does not shy away from love. Christ who lives in him is prompting him to give it without restraint. His freedom heals him day after day when the Evil One longs for him to allow his own "powers to unite to make him a slave of sin."[241] His freedom rises above ambitious attempts at defining Christian masculinity. God never spells out a pithy definition but points his created men to the goal he designed for masculinity. God did not create culture to restrict a man, but rather to give him the environment in which the Christian man can show his own personal shading of self-sacrifice through the gifts and personality given him by his God. It is when Jesus frees a man from constructs and prescriptive description that he sees his purpose. He walks each step as a priest of God and offers himself "as a living sacrifice" in every action, and this quite un-self-consciously in the extraordinary ordinary of daily life.[242]

240. R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 15.

241. Sören Kierkegaard, "A Project of Thought," in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David F. Swenson and Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), Section B: Paragraph B: "The Teacher."

242. Rom 12:1

CONCLUSION

Throughout the ages, Christian men have chased the reason for their existence. In their daring mission, many have risked falling into the ditches of legalism and despair. When a Christian man guided by Scripture contemplates the question, "What does it take to be a man?" he can know the answer. It takes removing the focus from self and directing it to Jesus. Masculinity is not about the "have to's" and "ought to's." It is entirely about the "get to's" and "love to's." Whether a man's calling is a fashion designer, blue-collar worker, writer, businessman, husband, father, teacher, or pastor, the Christian man witnesses Christ in all he does. Whether he is gentle, quiet, extroverted, or introverted, his identity can only be given by our gracious Father. Whether he is more Mr. Rogers than Braveheart, Christ leads him on.

The Christian man trusts in Christ's sacrifice, which brought forth genuine life in every facet. He lives a Christo-telic existence. As he battles flesh and sin constantly, he runs to the Messiah, whose end goal for him is real life now and forever. He dies and rises daily with Christ because his motivation stems from Jesus' undefinable love. He has witnessed this love for him, and it is that transcendent love that inspires the Christian man to leave perilous definitions behind and keep the goal before him. Having the clarity of Christ's love reveals the humble majesty of masculinity. The Christian man inspired by Jesus leaves behind self for the paradoxical glories of servanthood. He can imagine no greater delight than hearing his Messiah's voice saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant," knowing he has the robes of Christ's perfect righteousness thrown over his shoulders.[243] The voice of his eternal Mediator silences the voice of the sinful nature which pesters with words of "Poorly accomplished, you inadequate

243. Matt 25:23

failure." The *telos* of masculinity is a passionate endeavor with Christ, the Son of Man, as we struggle on to match his stride. When a man hears the words of masculinity's Maker, he begins to see that the Bible has always been countercultural as it heals every aspect of his shame. Scripture gives him spiritual sight, and he finds himself not clothed in his own heart's confusion but clothed in Christ. He rejoices in the awe-inspiring gift of Jesus' merit that is now his. He traverses life's trail with his real goal in mind. As the Christian man basks in the light of freedom, he is moved to give of himself boldly so the treasure of Christ-won joy may be received in the hearts of all those he serves. His deep desire is to embody Christ-centered masculinity and let nothing hold him back from the joyful, free adventure the Lord has set before him.

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