

Paul Maxwell on Masculinity Revisited

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[0 : 00] Welcome back. Today's question is what do you think of Paul Maxwell's theology of masculinity? How far do you think this applies in the UK? And there's a link to a video entitled Evangelical Culture is Beta Culture.

There's a transcript for that video available over on Paul Maxwell's site, SelfWire, and I will link that and the video below in the show notes. I highly recommend that you listen to or watch that video first or read the transcript before listening to my response.

It would help you to understand exactly what I'm interacting with. I have already responded in the past in a video to Paul Maxwell's work. I'm doing this again because for the last week or so a number of people have raised Paul Maxwell's work in conversation on fora that I'm a participant in and there's been all sorts of interesting discussion around the subject.

And so it's a live issue and I thought it would be good to tackle some of his arguments and engage with them and see where they lead us. Do they actually hold water and what can we say about them more generally?

I think to sum up his argument, the most critical paragraphs of starting in the second paragraph of his transcript, the most common complaint I hear from young women in the church who aren't feminist lunatics is that young men aren't actually men.

[1 : 24] What they mean is that most of the men who do very well in church culture are passive, submissive, compliant, well-behaved, insecure beta males who speak in vocal fry about loving Jesus, which is to say most Christian men who do well in evangelical churches are basically women.

Consequently, women are often blamed for men failing to grow into men, for failing to challenge men. This is of course only imaginable in the mind of an effeminate man who defers responsibility.

The real culprits for evangelical culture are the pastors who are promoted to positions of authority because they embody effeminacy best. That is, because churches are primarily constituted by women, most of the pastors who do well in evangelical churches are those who are women in every way, except their males.

This isn't universally true, but it is a cultural truism about evangelical churches. Men tell me this all the time. Church pastors are sissies, I can't respect them.

Church is just a female-oriented culture. What they mean, of course, is that in order to fit into evangelical culture, you must act like a woman. And they're 100% right for several reasons.

[2 : 35] Now this is a pretty strong and bold argument to make. I think on a number of points he is touching something very important, that this is certainly something that I have observed too.

Many men do not feel at home in the context of the church. The church is a context that has normalised a particular type of more feminine spirituality, and it's very hard for men to fit into that.

Men feel that the church is a domesticating institution, one that does not give them scope and context within which to express particularly male strengths.

And the very notion that the church might be a site where virility has expression is something that seems laughable, I think, to many of us. It is not a natural context for that.

And when we think about pastors, often pastors are seen, as they have been particularly since the 19th century, I think, as allies of the women within the church to feminise the men, or to domesticate the men.

[3 : 34] Now, there are all sorts of arguments and debates about the use of feminisation in the context of church culture. What do I mean by this?

When I use that term, I refer to the way in which the church has normalised feminine traits, more feminine traits, as the norm of piety.

And so there is a certain mode of spirituality that is presented in which women are more naturally and innately pious, and men are innately dysfunctional in some way, and they have to be changed.

They have to be... There is a sort of original sin that is very closely associated with their masculinity. It's not original sin in the context that we talk about in a proper theological sense.

But there is this sense that those traits that are associated with virility are fundamentally dysfunctional and toxic, and we need to deal with those. And this isn't a matter about abuse.

[4 : 36] This is a matter about just general expression of sort of male assertiveness, of male agonism, combativeness. These sorts of traits that we see within the context of male society.

And the very idea that men should have strong, robust societies of their own, again, this is seen as a problem. And since the 19th century, and particularly in the early 20th century onwards, there's been this close association of clergy with women as those who are dealing with dysfunctional men.

And so men are seen as dysfunctional, and that needs to be dealt with by the clergy who speak out on issues of temperance, gambling, all these sorts of things that are seen as stereotypically male vices, and very closely associated not just with some vices that men can fall into, but something that is associated with masculinity itself.

And the more that this attitude and this approach takes root within the church, the more that men feel that they don't really belong there, that there is something about the church that is closing down their natural virility.

It's not giving them a space to be manly. Rather, it's presenting manliness itself as toxic, on account of some vices that are particularly male. Now, this is a tricky thing to handle, because there are, I mean, if you look back at the 19th century and the early 20th century, there were deep problems with drunkenness and gambling and all these sorts of issues.

[6 : 15] We still have them today, not to the same scale in many respects. But the abuse that arose from that, and the other problems of failure to provide for families, these sorts of things, these were huge issues.

And so the church wasn't tackling nothing. It was a very important issue it was tackling. But it struggled to present men with a positive view of manliness as an alternative to that, with a positive male society that combat, that was an alternative to the dysfunctional forms of male society.

And so what you often had was a vision of the church as a domesticating, feminising institution, that served as an ally for women to tame the men within their lives.

And while this may have been necessary in certain respects, in dealing with male vices, it failed to present a positive vision of male virtue.

I mean, that very word virtue comes, has a sense of male strengths and ethical, ethical strengths within it.

[7 : 30] I mean, the within virtue refers to men. Virtue is a certain type of strength of character that can be exhibited by men. But it's very hard for us to think about that, to think about virtue as associated with something like virility, that we might think about masculinity and manhood and manliness as very positive things.

And that's something that's been a problem for the church for many years. Now, when we talk about feminisation of the church, it is this, I think, that is primarily being referred to, that men feel that those natural traits that are associated with manliness, with manhood and with masculinity are typically pathologised within the church.

Or if not pathologised, just given very little room for expression. The church is a place for men to be tamed, not for a place for men's strengths to be harnessed. And that's a different sort of thing.

Men are domesticated. And so the best men within the context of the church are often the men who lack any sort of virility. And this is a very real problem. And I think Paul Maxwell is speaking about this and trying to address it.

I do think that there is a number of problems with the ways that he does this, though. When we talk about feminisation, what we should not be talking about is the idea that women are associated with these negative traits and that any man who is...

[8 : 58] And when we talk about feminisation, we're saying implicitly, masculinisation is good, feminisation is bad. That shouldn't be what we're talking about.

Or men are good, women are bad. Male traits are good, female traits are bad. What we're talking about is the feminisation of men. When men are placed within a context that forces them to act overwhelmingly on the terms of women, in terms of women's more typical traits and virtues, and in terms of a context that privileges and foregrounds women in many different ways.

Now, people will often say that the church is primarily led by men and that this is an argument against any sense of the feminisation of the church. I don't believe it is.

When we actually look at the way that the clergy have functioned within the church, they have often functioned as a sort of... as allies of women, primarily.

Rather than those who present a vision of virility, of virtue, and of a positive manliness that men feel that they can aspire to, and as carving out realms of male companionship and community and intergenerational formation that men can belong to and find their virtues drawn out within.

[10 : 19] So this is an important thing to talk about. But we do need to be careful. Because if we're suggesting that women are lacking in... that women's traits are somehow weak and...

that they're not the sort of things that we should be celebrating, then there's a problem. And I think that he does fall into this trap at certain points. So, for instance, the way that women are associated with passivity, submission, compliance, good behaviour, insecurity, and things like that.

Now, there may be relative differences here. But... and this is one of the reasons why I think women have been seen as more naturally pious.

That these traits have been certainly privileged in certain respects. But I think we need to be careful about the way we talk about that. There are plenty of women who exhibit different sorts of traits.

And also, those traits expressed properly are not weak at all. They're not traits that are... or passivity is. But when we talk about submission...

[11 : 29] Submission can be a very courageous thing. Submission is also one of the things that makes authority effective. When we talk about compliance in certain contexts, that can be very important.

Good behaviour. I mean, good behaviour can be a very important thing. And insecurity viewed from another perspective is a lack of hubris. Now, when we're looking at these sorts of issues, it's very easy to fall into a trap of demonising or pathologising a certain set of traits associated with one sex and celebrating and valorising the other.

And this is the problem that, in part, has led us to this point, where the Church has been an institution that has foregrounded and celebrated a more feminine mode of virtue and spirituality and has often left men without context in which to express their virility.

The alternative is not the solution. Rather, we need to recognise the strengths of both men and women and how those interact together. Now, he talks about the way that male traits are demonised and the focus upon being nice and neutered civility.

And this is definitely an issue. There's... I've thought about this before in terms of the original conception of the film Zootopia. And in the original conception of that film, there wasn't a natural evolution of the predators into non-predatory animals.

[12 : 57] But rather, each one, when they came of age, had a tame colour imposed upon them. Any time they would have their predatory instincts come to the foreground.

And that wouldn't just be in terms of predation and killing, but in terms of excitement and exuberance and excess of agency, these sorts of things. The tame colour would kick in and give them an electric shock.

And through a sort of Pavlovian response, it would prevent them from exercising these sorts of traits. And obviously, that wasn't the sort of concept that you want in a popular Disney movie.

So it's a bit dystopian. So they wanted to remove that. But... and they changed the concept. But there is something about that that resonates with the way that niceness is put as a sort of tame colour upon many men who want to have a context within which they can express virility.

And virility is not about niceness. There is something about virility that is not safe, but it can be very good. And that safeness and that niceness, that neutered character, is something that has often been pursued by the church for its men.

[14 : 16] And the leaders of churches have often struggled with the biblical teaching about men and women because how do you deal with this? Because on the one hand, you have people who have a very patriarchal approach, who have a vision of the male as the head of the house, who's very much a little tyrant within his own little domain.

Or you have someone who's just seen as an empowerer of the woman in his life, that being the head of the house is primarily just there to be the one who empowers and serves his wife and children.

And neither of those actually capture the biblical vision because the biblical vision is very much one rooted in the concept of a household. A household is a realm of dominion and agency.

It's a realm that is rooted in the wider realm of society, not just in the domestic field, but that goes out into the world and takes dominion and exercises an agency within a public realm.

Now, within the modern world, we tend to work for businesses, for other households, as it were, and we bring the money back into our homes and then we build our homes up as nice domestic realms.

[15 : 29] Now, the concept of headship, then within that context, becomes either something that gets ingrown within the life of the house and within the domestic realm, where the man is a little domestic tyrant and it's about who wins in the argument, who has the final say, or it becomes something that's a neutered sort of thing, where the man is just there to empower the woman and his children and to guard this domestic space, but not to do anything beyond that.

He's just there to be the yes man, the one to back up with his strength, the woman's will within this domestic realm. Neither of those are good.

Within the more biblical vision, there is the vision of the man working out into the world, exercising dominion within the world, taming and transforming the world. And as we've lost this, the concept of headship becomes considerably more complex and difficult for us to understand and where it does get expressed.

And it can often be toxic and destructive. It can be something that is very abusive. It can be something that crushes women rather than empowering them, or it can be something that just stifles men and presents men as constantly scrabbling to attain to this perfect ideal that they can never attain to and always being blamed for failing to do that, having no dignity in their calling and having no dominion within the world.

Whereas the biblical vision is that of each man having his own vine and fig tree, having a realm of dominion that is his own, having a realm of dominion that is extended out into the world, where he has public status and a name within the gates.

[17 : 10] And this is something that the man is expected to exercise particularly. This is a realm that is particularly associated with the man, the realm of public deliberation, of public authority, of rule within society.

And this is something that we generally see within societies around the world, that this realm is dominated by men because this is a realm that has primarily been created by and maintained by men.

And the difficulty now is that men are placed very much in this realm where they don't know where they belong, what they are called to do. If you look at the church around the world, one of the things you'll notice is that men are more prominent within the church, the more that the church has a public face and influence and power.

Where that is gone, you often have the domestication, the turning in of the church upon itself. And it can be very dominant in the number of women that are members of such a church.

The church becomes a domesticating institution. And as such, it is something that is very much associated with the exertion of a female power towards men using the allies of the clergy.

[18 : 21] And this is difficult for us to talk about because there are all sorts of sensitivities that we have around these issues. The way that certain terms are used, like feminization, it can be misunderstood as a sense that women are associated with weak and inappropriate or pathologized traits.

That is not what it should be understood as. Rather, the problem is the feminization of men when men are denied or robbed of a realm of their own and then have to prove themselves or fit in with a realm that is deeply organized according to female traits and behaviors and tendencies and these sorts of things.

Now, what do we have as the alternative to that? We have a realm of dominion within the world. We form households. We exercise dominion out into the world and form a realm that belongs to, that is a realm of male agency.

We form male groups. We form networks that represent male agency within the world. Male agency exercise to transform the world and also to empower and to support and to protect households and the members of those so that women can form realms of their own.

And this is a bringing together of male and female ends in a common good where both have realms in which they are expanding within the world and they are exercising their agency, not in competition or combat against each other, as we often see within the modern marketplace, but in support and in unity with each other so that they are forming a realm where both of their strengths are expressed.

[20 : 06] And this is very difficult for us to understand. And the alternative that we have is often a realm where we do not have male strengths expressed. And so the church becomes turned in on itself, very much a hyper-domestic realm, concerned about its internal relations, but very ineffectual in making an effect and a powerful impact upon its society, of going out into the world, of exercising authority, of forming power, of forming networks which form power within the world.

These are things that the church is called to express. And it's one of the reasons why the church has had male leadership in these particular realms because the shepherd is supposed to relate the church, the pastor or the shepherd is supposed to relate the church to the wider world, not just have a therapeutic relationship and relationship with people in this very intimate realm of a family.

Now, there is this way in which the church is a family, but the church is more fundamentally a household. And the household is something that has the dimension of the family at the heart of it, but it is also something that is working outwards, exercising the minion, a realm of economic activity, of transformational activity within the world.

And when we've lost that, there are problems that occur. And there are people that are talking about recovering the concept of the household. I think of someone like C.R. Wiley, man of the house, or Alan Carlson, people like this are dealing with these questions and it's difficult to imagine what this might look like in our current context.

We have to imagine things within the context and the limits we find ourselves. Most of us will not be able to realise these goods in a full expression, but we can recognise the goods and we can work towards those.

[22 : 02] And to a limited degree, we can realise some of them. We can form households that are realms of dominion within the world, that are realms where male agency can find dignity and not just as being a domesticated member of a very feminised realm, but where they can be part of a male group, they can be part of a realm of male activity that actually forms something within the world.

And so what we have lost is not primarily to be associated with some dysfunctionality of the domestic sphere, but it's the loss of a sphere beyond that. The loss of a realm in which male agency can be expressed.

And that's not the fault of women so much. It's the fault of a number of different factors. It's partly the systems that we belong to. It's partly our economic system, the way that corporations now dominate capital and families don't have capital anymore.

Families aren't creative and economic institutions, institutions that have dominion. Rather, we have these big corporations and businesses and we work for them. We form and develop their dominion rather than our own.

And so that's part of the problem. Part of the problem is the way that the church has not formed these realms, has not seen itself as having this strong calling within the world and employed male strength within that context and given it dignity within that context.

[23 : 30] Part of the problem is also the way in which the structure of society seeks to emasculate men because men can work better if they are compliant and docile members of a system rather than actually exercising dominion and agency of their own.

And in the same way with women, but in slightly different respects. These are all factors that shape our current world and make it very difficult for us to develop these things.

So what do we do about this? I don't think we go into concepts like alpha and beta males, which is where Paul Maxwell goes. I think that is a problem.

That concept is one that focuses very much upon the detached male individual who is trying to form a masculinity in a very contrastive and performative way.

So on the one hand, contrastive, it's over against women. So it's being as extreme and as strong in expressing these supposedly manly traits as possible.

[24 : 38] And on the other hand, it's performative. It's something that is not based so much upon what you are, but upon performing a certain identity. And so there's bodybuilding or these sorts of things that are part of that.

And often there can be a particular emphasis upon the cosmetic features of masculinity, what it looks like on the surface, those markers that are associated with masculine traits or whatever it is.

Whereas in scripture, I think what we see is the rooting of masculinity in something deeper than that. In the same way as femininity can be associated with a certain feminine beauty, but the woman who's focusing increasingly upon makeup, there's something about femininity there that is lost.

That that is something that can have value, but the deeper reality of femininity does not lie on the surface. In the same way with masculinity and manliness, when we're talking about these things, we need to think about the deeper reality of masculinity.

And what we've lost, I think, is male groups. We've lost male contexts of expression and realms in which men can have dominion and act in a virile way within the world and that be seen as good.

[25 : 54] Now, when that has gone, it's very difficult for men to be anything other than pathologized or neutered because it's very difficult for them to exercise those traits in a way that is not dysfunctional.

What you have then is many men who fit into more female contexts, but by constantly stifling their masculinity. Now, there is something very good about the man who can control his masculinity, the man who can be nurturing in his relationship to children, the man who can be loving and compassionate and gentle, and all these different things.

These are traits that men will generally learn from women. Women will be their primary teachers in these sorts of traits. But what you see as men learn these traits is that they function best as a modulation and as a way of handling their male strengths.

When this is just a matter of not having developed any male strengths, then it's not a good thing. The nurturing of a man who is strong, who is able to exercise strength and agency out into the world, but is able to be gentle with a small child, that is a beautiful thing.

The man who can't exercise any strength within the world, but is very gentle with a child. The man who's just harmless, that is not such a good thing.

[27 : 23] The thing that we want from men is for men to be not safe, but good. And the man who's safe and harmless and neutered, he's not a good man.

He's not good at being a man. He's someone who's lost something that's very important to being a man. He can't stand up for himself, be assertive, exercise agency, push himself out into the world.

He's also someone who does not care about being part of a male community, and that matters. Part of the honour of a man is his concern to be viewed as a man by his male peers.

And when that is lost, there's something about the dignity of man that is lost. And so part of the concern that we should express is male groups within which men can find dignity, from the acknowledgement of their peers, and also the training, intergenerational training, into an appropriate and a good form of masculinity, where that masculinity is used in service of others.

Now, within the article, Paul Maxwell talks about locker room talk. He says, when the Donald Trump tape leaked, everyone demonised locker room talk.

[28 : 37] I understand why women reject it. They're women. They don't know what it's like to be a man. And they didn't grow up in male locker rooms. But the worst part of the public moral outrage against locker room talk was the horde of male feminists who said locker room talk is disgusting.

Men who engage in it are pigs. Listen, we shouldn't glorify sin. Men shouldn't be perverts. But they should be able to talk about girls they're attracted to, why they're attracted to them, and what they want to do with them.

Men should be able to have candid and crass conversations about sex. Single men do talk this way. And the church will fail to reach men to the degree that it disallows this kind of talk and insists on taking a fundamentally female posture towards locker room talk.

In the context of pursuing chastity and purity, men should be able to have frank, jesting, humorous conversations over a cigar about women and sex. No, I don't think this is right at all.

I think this is ridiculous. When he's talking about locker room talk, locker room talk, in my experience, is not a good thing. It is something that is deeply toxic for men and it's something that is deeply dehumanising for women.

[29 : 44] I don't think that we should celebrate it. There is something about male talk, however, that is important. The roughness and antagonism of male talk and the agonism of male talk is a very positive thing.

When you go into male groups, there's a roughness in the way that men can interact with each other. They try and push each other and they try and test each other, stress test each other. And within male groups, a lot of this will be a new member of the group.

You test them, see how strong they can, how well they can stand up to unreasonable treatment, for instance. And many people will see this merely as bullying. Often it's not bullying.

It's more complex than that. But there's something about male groups that want to test the strength of their male peers. They also are not gentle.

They emphasise toughness and strength. They emphasise the ability to engage in agonism, to combat, to stand up for yourself, to fight your corner. And these are important and good things.

[30 : 42] The church has often not recognised this. And as anyone who has experienced male groups should know, when women come into such a context, everything gets toned down. Men stop talking in the same way with each other.

And when a woman enters a group, except for the rare woman who can work on those terms, men don't talk in the same way because they recognise that you have to be more gentle around women, that women can't accept this way of talking in the same way.

They feel threatened by it and they feel marginalised, that you have to give space, you have to step back, you have to, you can't interrupt when you're talking to women in the same way as you can when you're talking to men.

Those things that men do typically within their conversations where they're trying to form a sort of dominance and push against each other and test each other and test the strength of ideas, if you do that with women you get yourself in trouble because women are not used to that sort of interaction.

And so there's a certain sort of male conversation that the church should celebrate and maintain but yet this is a very different thing from locker room talk which is coarse jesting, which is a number of the things that scripture talks about as corrupt communication, things that should not be coming out of our mouth.

[32 : 03] And when we look at scripture there is a deep and sustained challenge to many forms of male culture, to certain forms of honour culture and honour culture is a deeply male culture.

It has a deep challenge to coarse jesting and these sorts of things that are very much a part of a certain type of male culture. It has a challenge to male violence and these sorts of things need to be considered when we're talking about masculinity that scripture does not just give us a positive affirmation of everything that belongs to male culture or female culture for that matter.

Rather it challenges it and calls it to change. A locker room talk is definitely example of that sort of thing that needs to change. That does not mean that there aren't typical forms of male conversation that are rough and challenging, that are combative, that are agonistic, that are featuring high agency and these sorts of things and require some and often require some sort of guardrails to prevent things from going completely in the direction of antagonism and violence.

But this is not the same thing as corrupt communication of sexualised speech about women that is... I mean when we talk about the importance of chastity and purity that is something that we need to guard in others not just in ourselves.

When we talk about others we should talk about them in a way that protects their purity and their chastity by speaking about them in a way that is honouring, in a way that puts a veil over things that would sexualise them.

[33 : 44] It's very important that we do this. If we can't do this and yet we're part of a culture that in certain cases has very strong restrictions upon what women should wear, there's something deeply dysfunctional about what we're doing.

We need to be very careful about our communication, to speak about women as... with honour, speak about them in a way that does not sexualise them because the more that we speak about them in that way, the more that we'll look at them and perceive them and act towards them in that way.

And this is not good and so I think I completely disagree with Maxwell on this point. I think this is very dangerous and I think that we need to stand against this sort of thing while maintaining an appropriate form of rough male speech and the goodness of context within which that can take place.

He points out the fact that men won't wait for evangelicalism to change and I think, yes, I've seen a lot of this and part of this is related to class issues as well. There's a certain sort of middle class and upper middle class man who's very good at adapting himself to mixed contexts, to contexts within which he has to act upon more feminine terms.

The metrosexual character, these sorts of characters can often work in that context very well. They can be those who are very nice, very agreeable, very compliant and these sorts of things.

[35 : 03] They work in white collar jobs and they're not used to being around other men. They've not got much manliness in their character and so they can work well in these contexts.

The problem is that often when you go to working class men they feel deeply out of context within the church because they're more used to male contexts.

They're more used to an actual masculinity and manliness in their culture and so they struggle within the church. It's one of the reasons why the church can often find it difficult to reach out to such men.

However, if you have good intergenerational male society, if you have a strong form of manly society within the church you can reach these men. You can speak to them as men and they will respect you as you speak to them in that way.

But this is not something that most churches are good at and most churches can struggle with this sort of thing. Rather, they're trying to conform men to the preferences of their wives.

[36 : 09] Now, he talks about men not being allowed to be intimate. Intimate is probably not the best term, but male groups allow for male connection and allow for men to express their emotions.

And when you do not have strong male groups, men will struggle to express their emotions. Men can sing in male groups in a way that men can't sing in mixed groups. Men can express their emotion in male groups in a way that they can't in mixed groups often.

And as we've closed down male groups precisely because they are powerful and influential and tried to integrate them, we have lost the context within which men can express themselves emotionally and find emotional support often.

And this is very difficult. It's something that we need to recover. Evangelicalism's best masculinity is still effeminate, he argues. And he talks here about the council of biblical manhood and womanhood, that there's no embodiment of masculinity, there's just a talking about masculinity.

And that is definitely a problem within many contexts. We talk about masculinity in part because masculinity has become an abstract thing. It's not something that's rooted within the context of the world.

[37 : 25] It's not something rooted within particular callings and the need to exercise male strength within the world. The problem is that this sort of masculinity that Paul Maxwell is putting forward can often be characterised by the same underlying problems.

Its performativity and its contrastive nature is often a result of contexts within which there just is not enough of a constitutive notion of what being a man is.

There's not enough male society to just give men security in being men. Rather you need to perform this. You need to become the caricature of a man in order to truly be a man.

You need to pursue being an alpha male. You can't be a beta male. But within any healthy male society there are a variety of different men. And men are not exercising everything to the max.

Rather men can form a lot of different types of virtue within these contexts. And different types of traits find expression. There can be creative and artistic men.

[38 : 31] There can be men who are bodybuilders and men who are characterised by physical strength. There can be men who have a very masculine cast of mind. And all these sorts of things can be expressed within male community.

Because manliness is not just a single set of traits. But it is something that can be rooted within the variegated forms that you find within male community. And that's something that is easily lost when we get to this flattened version of masculinity that thinks primarily in terms of alpha and beta males.

Which also unfortunately is the language of pick-up artists and the manosphere and does not make for very good fellow travellers for a healthy Christian understanding of what manliness means.

If we're going to think about a healthy concept of manliness what we need is a deeper understanding of manliness. Something that is not focused merely upon these external markers and something that is more attentive to the deeper reality of male society.

The strength of male society. Strength of character and will and agency and these sorts of things within the world. And I don't think that this is giving us the best framework within which to work.

[39 : 44] So on those points I have very strong disagreements with his approach. The alpha and beta taxonomy just does not lead to illumination.

Rather it invites a lot of problems. And I would highly advise that we avoid that language and think in more positive terms. What we have lost has often been male community, male contacts, intergenerational male relations, fathers and father figures and a concept of fatherhood.

These are the sorts of things we have lost. And within those contexts we can have a rich expression of masculinity in its many different forms without having to just develop into caricatures and pursue a sort of caricature in order to mark ourselves out.

Are you really a man? Do you eat the right sort of products? Do you bathe with the right sort of shower gel? Do you wear the right sort of whatever it is?

Do you wear the right sort of clothes? And our preoccupation with those sorts of features can often be deeply misguided and can be a result of a society that is hyper performative where we've been individualised, where we've been robbed of any meaningful realm where masculinity, virility and male virtue would have significance and world rooted meaning.

[41 : 13] meaning and so we've developed this emphasis upon having to mark ourselves out by highly performative approaches. And so again I think this needs to be avoided and I think there are problems here.

So I think he's talking about a number of real issues within the church in ways that are not the best. I think it's unfortunate. I think that there are also the celebration of the alpha type.

There are times we do need that sort of type and there are ways in which scripture celebrates this sort of person. Often the person who's characterised by zeal. The person like Phineas who will stop the plague by thrusting a spear through two people or the Levites who will kill 3,000 of their brethren.

And it's interesting in scripture just how many of the leaders of God's people were people who took others lives. Now we tend to think about that purely in terms of pathologisation but within scripture it's seen as there is a good trait here that needs to be harnessed.

This is a particularly male trait but we need these sorts of people. And so what scripture does not do is say that every man must be like that. Rather it recognises that there are a particular type of men that are like this and they should be celebrated if they are using that trait effectively and appropriately.

[42 : 34] But there are many other types of men and those other types of men can develop different strengths. And this emphasis upon alpha as good and beta as bad and this particular vision of masculinity is just unhelpful.

It's very misguided. And so he talks about some of the traits of alpha males. Aggressive energy, high openness to question the basic tenets of Christianity, high trait self-assurance.

many of these things have their place. But you don't want to have as the leader of your church someone who enjoys questioning the basic tenets of Christianity.

This is not a healthy thing. These are not the sorts of people that you want as your elders and your pastors. There are ways in which these traits in their raw form are not good.

They need to be trained, they need to be harnessed, they need to be honed, they need to be developed, they need to be knocked down a bit. In certain respects. And that aggressive energy, again, there is a time and a place.

[43 : 42] A man who cannot control his aggressive energy, who cannot exercise that, who cannot show deep gentleness when the time calls for it. It's not much of a man at all.

He's just a man who's led by his masculine impulses rather than a man who actually has mastery of masculine, a repertoire of masculine behaviours and potential, which is what we're looking for.

We're looking for men who can exercise masculine strengths, but are not just at the mercy of masculine inclinations and tendencies. Men who understand how women see the world to some extent, who are attentive to women.

Those are the sorts of men we want. Men who can exercise that, who can function appropriately in a context where they need to be nice, but also who can be rough and combative when they need to too.

And what we often get are just men who are amped up on a quest for alpha malehood and testosterone fuelled vision of their masculinity and it's just not healthy.

[44 : 45] These people are creatures of impulse rather than people who have actually mastered the potential that masculinity gives you. people. And so I'd highly recommend looking a bit at some of these concepts, breaking down some of the things that are being suggested here, because I don't think that it is the most helpful way to respond to some very real problems that he is identifying within the church.

What we do need to do is develop male context, develop realms in which men can express dominion, develop strong male groups within which men are formed and which men can learn to be men among men and find dignity in that.

And we need to develop this in a way that is of service to the whole church. It is not primarily about distinguishing men from women and constantly fighting against that relationship with women, constantly wanting to distinguish ourselves, but which recognises that there is a distinction and then uses male strengths to serve and to bless others, to transform the world for the glory of God.

and this vision of masculinity I think is a far healthier one. It's not formed primarily by these antagonisms between male and female society, male and female traits and tendencies.

We need to recognise that what we need more than anything else within our society, which is constantly pitting men and women against each other, is a recognition of our distinctions in the service of a common good, that we are about the same common goods and we should be serving and blessing each other as we seek those things, while recognising that we have distinct spaces and distinct tendencies, distinct spheres of operation, not entirely distinct, but there should be a realm in which we can play to our distinct strengths.

[46 : 37] And when that is lost, we end up with all sorts of problems. And so the collapsing of male and female spaces into each other leaves both of men and women feeling stifled and embattled and besieged and it's just not good.

What we need is a realm of life that brings together men and women in the service of that common good and that gives them spheres within which they can act accordingly and serve those things, overlapping spheres.

And this, I think, is found primarily in visions of the household that we see in scripture and elsewhere. We need to be pursuing something that is analogous to that because otherwise we'll end up increasingly with a politics, with a society, with a vision of the church that is pitting the needs of women against the needs of men.

And this has not led to good results and it's not going to lead to any better results. If you have any further questions please leave them on my PecorisCat account.

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