

Beyond the Red Pill - A Perspective on Christian Masculinity,

Pt. 1

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We are living in a culture that portrays masculinity as an oppressive social construct that the American Psychological Association has deemed “on the whole, harmful.” The charge of ‘toxic masculinity’ has resulted in attempts to emasculate men and boys at every level of society by characterising natural male tendencies as oppressive and destructive. Unfortunately, in the absence of a balanced biblical perspective, attempts to push back on the toxic masculinity narrative have often promoted a brand of masculinity that accommodates misogyny and abuse.

Some of that pushback has come in the form of the ‘red pill’ community which draws its name from the 1999 film ‘The Matrix’ in which the central character Neo is given a choice between a blue or red pill. Blue represents a capitulation to the status quo. The red pill opens eyes to ‘reality’. Red pill ideology maintains that men, not women, are oppressed and disenfranchised. The red pill community is closely related to the manosphere. In this largely insular online community, men share their grievances about women taking their lead from alpha male influencers, prominent among whom is Andrew Tate.

According to Google, in 2022, Tate was the most Googled man on the planet. Tate is a self-styled “success coach” for men. He made much of his fortune from the pornographic industry and has recently been charged with rape, human trafficking and forming an organised crime group to exploit women sexually. Yet, few people polarise opinions like Andrew Tate - hailed as a guru by his followers, vilified and cancelled by his critics as a dangerous influence on impressionable young men.

Tate is a paradox because his critique of the prevailing Western culture resonates with Bible-believing Christians and those with conservative values. He advocates for hard work, financial security, discipline, physical fitness, stoicism and courage.

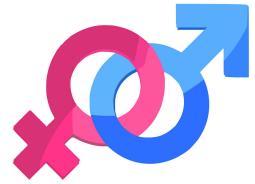
However, while his analysis of the attack on, and demise of masculinity is often very accurate, the problem lies with the solutions he has proposed. They include the promotion of materialism, promiscuity, and a disdain for women, who he has described as ‘property’ and ‘assets’. Conclusions about who Tate really is depend on which point in his life one chooses to focus and whether his vocal support for Christian values and his recent conversion to Islam are credible evidence of character reformation. Whatever the truth of the matter, his unabashed expression of alpha masculinity holds great appeal for many.



Traditionally, masculinity has been defined in terms of winning, risk-taking, violence, dominance, sexual prowess, self-reliance, the primacy of work, power over women, and the pursuit of status. For decades this view of masculinity has been eroded against the backdrop of third-wave feminism, gender ideology and political correctness. While seeking to create a society where men and women operate on a level playing field in all walks of life, progressives have also sought to eradicate the concept of masculinity as an irrelevant social construct.

Confusion over gender roles in society compounds the need for a clear biblical perspective that

God created men and women to complement one another - different but equal. Differences are anatomical, emotional, physiological, chemical and psychological. Neuroscientific discoveries have demonstrated that male and female brains are wired differently, giving scientific credence to many long-held stereotypical beliefs about the genders.



We must always recognise and appreciate that wide variations in personality, gifts, and abilities influence how masculinity and femininity are expressed. There is no one way to be masculine. However, it is also self-evident that we are endowed with gender-determined strengths and capacities that pre-dispose us to occupy different roles. It was not by accident that it was men who were commanded, “Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes” (Nehemiah 4:14). What would we think of a man who would send his wife to investigate a suspicious noise in the house in the middle of the night? The Apostle Paul also recognised that men and women generally have different primary drives for affection and recognition when counselled men, “each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (Ephesians 5:33).

Paul’s words notwithstanding, it would be a great mistake to assume that men do not crave emotional connection, warmth, honesty, openness and authenticity. Many are genuinely interested in spirituality, meaning and purpose and ask deep questions. They want to know how to become better husbands and fathers. They want to know how to deal with complex emotions. However, men are highly sensitive to anything that questions their masculinity, and unfortunately, how we tend to practice our faith does just that.



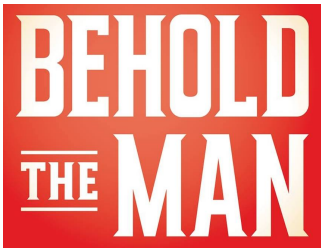
Rather than provide the practical challenges; motivational messages; social activities; and a sense of purpose that men tend to crave, we ask men to hold hands to pray, hug their neighbours, sing love songs to Jesus and express their emotions publicly. Nineteenth-century evangelist Charles Spurgeon challenged the tendency to feminise the church when he said, “There has got abroad a notion, somehow, that if you become a Christian, you must sink your manliness and turn milksop”.

On the contrary, the call to surrender to Christ is a call to a life of courage and integrity, not passive conformity. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, may appeal to some, but men generally prefer the Jesus who turns over tables; tells it like it is to the Pharisees; defends the damsel in distress; challenges the status quo and sends demons packing with their tail between their legs. The same Jesus who said, “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39) is the same warrior Jesus who will return to wage war on His enemies with fire in His eyes (see Revelation 19:11). The choice of which Jesus we will serve is not an “either/or”, it is a “both/and.” To make Christianity more appealing to men, we must avoid substituting one stereotyped view of an insipid Jesus with another version which is an adventure-seeking, iron-pumping, back-slapping, “one of the lads.” Jesus is the prime example of what it means to be a real man who is fully in touch with his emotions yet remains fully masculine. Ellen White counselled men, “They must study His nobility, His manliness.

Western Christianity has overemphasised the traits of Jesus’ character that are generally associated with femininity while giving insufficient attention to those that demonstrate masculinity.

However, our primary goal must not be to magnify the masculine traits of Jesus but to emphasise His character. As men are transformed into His image, they are empowered to live out His ideals in a manner consistent with their manhood. The true virtues of masculinity cannot be socially engineered. The values we often associate with masculinity, like courage, honour, integrity, determination, and protectiveness, are all outgrowths of character transformation through a living connection with God. Ellen White commented, “All that makes men manly, or women womanly, is reflected from the character of Christ (RH Jan.4 1881).

There is no time in the church’s history when the demonstration of Christian manhood is more critical. We live in a society where most boys and young men are educated by women at primary and secondary levels. In the church, men are vastly outnumbered and often shy away from leadership responsibilities. Sabbath School teachers and Pathfinder leaders tend to be female. Add to that the fact that many boys in our communities and in the church are raised (admirably) by single mothers and that in many homes where fathers are physically present, they are MIA (missing in action) when it comes to mentoring their sons. All these factors contribute to a lack of young men being trained by older men to be men and to become disciples of Jesus Christ.



We desperately need men who are committed to Jesus Christ, dedicated to their families and God-honouring labour, to step up to the challenge issued by Paul to “guide the young men to live disciplined lives. But mostly, show them all this by doing it yourself, incorruptible in your teaching, your words solid and sane” (Titus 2:6-8, The Message Bible).