

Title: Is the Church Too Feminine?

Guests: Chase Turner and Marcus Stenson

Welcome to the Radically Christian Bible study podcast. I'm your host, Wes McAdams. Here, we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. Today, I am joined by my friends Marcus Stenson and Chase Turner. We are going to talk about what the church should look like, what the church should be like, and, specifically, around the question of "Is the church too feminine today? Should the church be more masculine?" There's a lot of push, and there has been for the last few years -- a push for the church to be more masculine, an argument that the church is sort of driving away young men or not attracting young men because the church is too feminine. We're going to get into that and talk about that today here in just a second.

WES: Okay. Let's kind of introduce everybody. Chase has been with us the last few weeks, so let's introduce Marcus first. Marcus Stenson has been on the podcast before, but it's been a little bit. Marcus, welcome back, Brother. How are you?

MARCUS: Hey, man, I'm doing great. Thanks for having me. It's been too long.

WES: Glad to have you back. Glad to have you back, Brother.

And, Chase, welcome back. How are you, Brother?

CHASE: I am doing well. Thank you. It's always a pleasure to get to visit with brothers about fun topics, and appreciate all you do for this podcast, and pleasure to know you, Brother.

WES: Well, I appreciate both of you being part of this conversation. The last few weeks have been really rich in that I've gotten to have some really good conversations with people that I highly respect, so I appreciate all the work that you both do in the kingdom of God, and just being good friends and the benefit that I get from just knowing you.

So let's talk about these terms "masculine" and "feminine." They're words that get thrown around a lot. We can talk about "male" and "female," but let's talk specifically about "masculine" and "feminine." What do those words mean, in your mind, and do you find those terms helpful or sometimes harmful or hurtful?

Marcus, let's start with you, Brother. What are your thoughts around the terms "masculine" and "feminine"?

MARCUS: Man, this is such a good question, and it feels loaded given the cultural climate that we sit in today, within the church and without. For me, personally, I don't find "masculine" and "feminine," as terms or characteristics, to be offensive in any way. I don't think that they are terms that reduce us. I think they're terms that actually help us to understand more this idea that, between male and female, there's certainly a lot of overlapping characteristics, but there are distinguishable characteristics, and these are things that are part of our lived experience, part of our life experience, that seem to be understood naturally. They're things that happen in our social context, but they're also things that can be distinguished and understood even before those social layers get put on. Very early in childhood, when a kid is born, there are certain things that would lead us to believe that, you know, the wiring is a little bit different between male and female. So those

masculine and feminine traits, I don't think, necessarily reduce us to something less, but actually just, in my opinion, and I think in the scripture's opinion, give us a fuller understanding of who we truly are, so I don't think that they are inherently harmful.

I do think that, removed from that context and that paradigm and a correct understanding, they, like so many other concepts, can be weaponized to do great damage and great harm, and I think that that's why there's a lot of confusion right now. There's a lot of hurt. There's a lot of blood in the water, so to speak, because the human race and, unfortunately, even within the church sometimes, we don't have the greatest track record of not weaponizing these things against one another, so I hope that this conversation will be one that works to the opposite, frankly.

WES: Yeah. Good thoughts. Chase, any thoughts on those terms?

CHASE: Yeah. My background has been Spanish ministry for the last 15 years, and when you cross culture with these particular terms, my experience has been more that the terms have not been so helpful. I wouldn't say they've been directly harmful, but I don't feel like they've been helpful, and so maybe neutral in some ways, but I would probably lean more towards not helpful, primarily because in the Hispanic culture, which is really becoming more prevalent in the U.S. culture -- but the Hispanic culture leans towards masculinity being a negative thing. It leans more towards domineering and above. And the feminine culture is more -- I don't want to be brass, but kind of barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen. Like it's very much a lesser role, and I've seen a lot of that in Hispanic culture creep into the church within, not necessarily our roles, but our attitudes. And you

have an attitude that would appear to be masculine, and you have an attitude that would appear to be feminine from the standpoint of one being superior and the other being inferior, and so it creates a persona more than it does a role.

And if a man is seen as what we would define as feminine, it has a very negative connotation, and a woman who is seen as masculine -- again, we're using these terms to identify a persona, not even necessarily a human. It's like the air they carry about them. And so it can be harmful, in a general context, as an identifying marker of a human being. That's why God created us human, with differences, but also, as Marcus was saying, with similarities that are important for us to identify.

WES: You know -- and I appreciate that, both of your thoughts there. And to kind of touch on both of those and maybe even to go in just a little bit different direction, you know, it's interesting that right now -- Marcus, you touched on sort of the challenging culture that we're in right now, the way that this can be a very sensitive topic. And, Chase, I appreciate you bringing out the idea of not just the American culture, but also other cultures and how they might interpret masculinity and femininity.

But it's interesting that sort of with the progressive culture that we have that's prevalent in the United States right now, this idea of a separation between gender and biological sex and how the church, how Christians tend to push back from that idea in one sense, but then in another sense tend to reinforce that idea that biological sex and gender are these two different things, where we have men who are sort of trying to hold on to what they would see as biblical masculinity, and ascribing femininity to biological

males by saying they are acting feminine or they are being feminine because of certain characteristics, and so they're not talking about biology; they're talking about gender.

And so often, when we get into conversations like this, what we find are gender stereotypes rather than things -- and I agree with what Marcus was saying there in the beginning, that there are things that little boys tend, you know, generally speaking, to do certain things, little girls tend to do certain things, but so quickly, culture shapes what we think of as masculinity or femininity. And to use that term Marcus used earlier, "weaponize" -- we weaponize these gendered ideas and we call boys -- we accuse little boys of not being a real man or tell them that they're acting like a girl. I suppose that that probably happens on the other side, as well, where little girls are accused of being, quote-unquote, a "tomboy."

And so these ideas -- we, in the church, in Christianity, can be just as guilty sometimes of separating biological sex from gender and then reinforcing some of these false and sometimes unhelpful and, again, sometimes hurtful gender stereotypes, where we're saying boys act like this and girls act like this, or these are masculine traits and these are feminine traits. Well, a lot of that is just coming from culture or it's coming from stereotypes, and it's really not helpful.

I was watching a sermon from a church, and this sermon series was all about being real men, real men. And their intro video, of course, was filled with dirt bikes and Jeeps and tanks and military aircraft, and it's like, what does that have to do with being a real man? Because being a man is about the anatomy that you have. Being a woman is about the anatomy that you

have. At least that tends to be what Christians are trying to say, that being a man is about who you are biologically; being a woman is about who you are biologically. What does that have to do with tanks and Jeeps and dirt bikes? Maybe there are some men who prefer that, and maybe there are some woman that prefer cooking, but there are also men who prefer cooking and, I guess, women that enjoy dirt bikes.

So, again, I think that we get so confused, and I feel like Christians, and churches, even, are adding to that confusion when they double down on the gender stereotypes and they double down on what it means to be a, quote-unquote, "real man" or a biblical woman, or whatever the case may be, and we're really just confusing the issue, in my mind, so many times.

Any thoughts on that, Marcus? We'll come back to you, I guess.

MARCUS: Yeah. I think what you just put into words is so well stated that I hesitate to try and add anything to that, other than I think that the root of this goes all the way back to the fall, and I think for us to try and understand the problems that we have with gender, biology, or roles, and how those different things manifest themselves as what being a real man or a real woman is, cannot be rightly understood outside of that paradigm and that foundation.

We have to remember that the way that we can sexualize these things as people, and what the church has been guilty of smuggling into its understanding of what these things mean, is rooted in a very broken understanding of our identity, who we are, all the way back to the garden. And so when we are not seeing correctly, when we are in this fallen state, we do misunderstand ourselves and what that looks like. It's part of the original

curse in the garden, that masculinity somehow lords over femininity and there's nothing you can do about it and this is the way things work. And you see this from a really fundamentalist point of view, as Chase was talking about earlier, this kind of negative masculinity that says women are barefoot in the kitchen and that's all they're ever supposed to be. And you also see it on the other side, too, coming from the other direction, so maybe that's something we can talk about a little bit here.

I think that what these terms ought to really mean to us as Christians, and how they ought to be lived out -- I think that the church is a callback to before Genesis 3, and that's what we ought to be pursuing, which is so difficult to truly step out of our social context because these things get wired into us and programmed over and over and over again in these social norms.

So I think I'll leave it at that for now, but I think the problem goes way, way, way, way back. It's not just a modern misunderstanding. This is something that's been in us ever since the fall happened, and we're still trying to unwind it, I would say.

WES: Yeah, great point. In fact, that reminds me of -- I was reading a book on the war between the Greeks and Persians, and I think it was the Greeks were accusing the Persians of being feminine because they wore pants, and they saw wearing pants as being something that women did. So anyway, yeah, so that idea of accusing someone of not being masculine enough or being too feminine or not being feminine enough, those types of ideas are part of the brokenness that's been present in our world.

Chase, any thoughts on that before we go on to the next question?

CHASE: Yeah, I love that you brought that -- all of that into this

conversation because I think, within the world, and within the church culture, even, lately, that one of our greatest fears as parents is that our boys have any kind of feminine qualities, even more so than if our girls have masculine qualities, if we're going to use those terms. If I have a daughter who's not the princess role, it doesn't make her less of a girl or a woman; it just means she doesn't like wearing dresses. But we create this negativity about she's not the gender -- or her characteristics are not of the gender the way we specify it. And if your son has any, you know, feminine qualities, it's like -- the mindset becomes, well, I hope they're not gay. Like that is the general outlook from people that I've talked to, and so the first instant that one of your sons displays anything -- oh, they like the color pink. No, you can't. You have to like blue or black. That's the thing we immediately combat. And like you said, it has nothing to do with the way God designed the human body. It has nothing to do with anatomy. It's become a faux pas of sorts to speak to boys liking things that should be feminine.

And so, as parents, I think it's something we have to be really careful about because, generationally, it's going to have an impact, and so -- it's a conversation that Kristen, my wife, and I have had, and even a couple nights ago, looking at the broad scope of masculinity and femininity and going back to the garden, the way the man works and the woman, typically, for a long time, didn't work -- I told Kristen, I said, you know, I've got another 30 or 40 years where I have to work and provide, and you don't have to at all. I'm not saying your role in the home is any different. You get to choose to work. That's a privilege of choice that you have, and, again, that masculinity -- I was like, but I don't have a choice. What happens to me if I

decide, as a man, I'm not going to work? I'm worthless. But if you don't work, you're in the home, and that's okay in our society. It doesn't seem just sometimes. And so, again, starting with the kid age and moving our way up, it can create some problems if we don't have a proper understanding of how God created us and who he created us to be.

WES: Yeah. And I can't help -- I mean, you mentioned "gay" a second ago, and I don't want to go too far down that trail about gender dysphoria, but there's a lot of people, a lot of our neighbors, a lot of our brothers and sisters, that really struggle with gender dysphoria, and I can't help but think that that problem is only exacerbated by the fact that, even in the church, we are doubling down on gender stereotypes. I don't fit the gender stereotypes of masculinity that are put forth. I don't drive a four-wheel drive. I don't ride a dirt bike. I don't shoot guns very often. I'm not a hunter. I mean, there's so many things that -- and as a young man, really, I was not athletic. I was not physically strong. There's so many things that -- you know, and like every teenage boy or middle school boy, I was called all kinds of names to try to misgender me on purpose, you know, to tease, but that happens especially to these young people that are struggling with gender dysphoria. And when that happens in the church, when we reinforce those gender stereotypes as if strength is masculine or as if grace and kindness is feminine, these are, really, I feel like, big misunderstandings of what it means to be human, what masculinity and femininity are.

But let's get into scripture a little bit and ask you guys, what are some of the scriptures that inform your thinking as it pertains to -- we talked about the fall, but as it pertains to being a man or being a woman or masculinity,

femininity? What are some of your go-to scriptures? What scriptures really shape your thinking on this?

Chase, we'll kind of start with you on this one.

CHASE: The Sermon on the Mount is something -- really, the gospels are -- I know it's a broad go-to, but the whole purpose behind Jesus coming to create a kingdom, in my mind, was to create equality. And I think, because of the way women were treated before Jesus came on the scene, and even while he was there, they were such a piece of property, and that Jesus coming to create equality, to me, has shaped, in some ways, the way that I would seek to understand the differences and respect the differences between masculine/feminine, male/female in a way that kind of -- we discussed a little bit earlier -- creates equality, that we're on the same page.

You had mentioned just a second ago how that -- since when did God say that being a man meant you were strong, or that when you were a woman you were full of grace, but men weren't? And it's countercultural in the U.S., and in other cultures, as well, to think that being a man means you have to be strong. Well, no, your anatomy, like you said, determines whether you're a man or a woman, and your -- what you're exposed to as a child and moving your way up determines how masculine or feminine, by definition, that we become, but it doesn't change your gender.

And so Jesus' teaching on creating equality through the Sermon on the Mount is one of the places I like to go just to look at just the equality that's created. And Paul, in Romans, when he talks about there is no male or female -- you know, I know he's not referring to there's no such thing as a man or no such thing as a woman, but, again, creating that equality within

the kingdom of God, which was what Jesus came to do, helps me to see no one's better, so to speak, than the other, and there's no defining quality within scripture that says one is better than the other.

And some of the other questions I think we're going to look at -- there's some other texts that come to mind, but I'll leave it to Jesus and Paul in there with the male and female kind of teaching, creating equality.

WES: Yeah. Marcus, how about you?

MARCUS: Man, I don't think you have to go much further than actually just looking at the life of Jesus, and I think a lot of times what we end up doing is -- you know, we might look at his treatment of men and of women and we might see how that critiques and undermines the way that we approach these issues, and I think it certainly does. But I think one of the more powerful things, to me, speaking of Jesus and Paul, is that I don't think I would know -- I've never encountered anyone that would say Jesus is not masculine, and that should tell me right away that the way that we conceptualize these things is a little bit different and we don't use the same scales of application. I don't ever see anyone saying Jesus was too feminine -- not a true disciple of Jesus.

I think that sometimes these characteristics that we attribute to femininity or masculinity are really not -- if we would look at any of the fruit of the Spirit that's in Galatians chapter 5, verses 22 and 23 and say that something like kindness or gentleness is not manly enough or not masculine enough, those are fruit of the Spirit, regardless of whether you are biologically male or female, and I think it's a red flag to us. It ought to be an alarm going off that we are not thinking about this well. We're certainly not

thinking through this with the Spirit if we would consider any of those qualities not to be masculine enough or too overly feminine. So that's the first point of demarcation for me to check and say, well, because of this, then the way that Jesus actually behaves in the gospel accounts actually makes sense, and it makes sense for him to be my example.

Recently, I was looking at John, you know, chapter 3, and Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, someone who was not exhibiting typical masculine traits, coming to Jesus by night because of fear, not being courageous, not being bold, not being brash, not leading from the front, so to speak. But then comparing what you see after the crucifixion, now Nicodemus steps boldly into the presence of Pilate where he does exhibit that courageousness, puts his own life at risk as identifying with someone who was part of an alleged insurrection, puts his financial and social status at risk, as well, but then does a job that, traditionally, in caring for the body of Jesus, was reserved for slaves or women because it was, at that time, a very feminine thing to do. So we see somebody who's exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit in a way that contradicts the labels that we want to place on different jobs and different actions and different activities.

So I see in Galatians, in Paul's work, I see in Jesus' life and the way that he worked with his disciples, both male and female, and then I see in other characters, like Nicodemus, just places where our conceptions of masculine and feminine have smuggled in the way the world looks at these things instead of the way that the scripture looks at these things.

WES: Yeah. Great, great points, both of you. I keep coming back to these ideas of stereotypes and how -- I love the language that you're using,

Marcus, about smuggling things into. It's all about -- so much of what we talk about on this podcast is really exegesis, you know, reading the text for what it is, versus this eisegesis, where we're reading our own ideas, our cultural assumptions into the text, and we have to be so careful not to do that.

And, I mean, I personally want to be really clear, and I think we're all saying this, that scripture definitely says that men are distinct from women, but that's a -- primarily, a biological distinction, that men are biologically distinct from women. And I do think that scripture gives -- that God gives different responsibilities -- and that might be the best way to talk about it -- responsibilities to men and to women. Women have the responsibility, as a whole -- not every woman is going to be a mother, but as a whole, women have the responsibility of bringing children into the world. Men have -- you mentioned earlier, Chase, about taking care of their family, providing for their family, so men have that responsibility. But I think where we tend to go wrong, and where I just don't find any backing in scripture, is taking more personality qualities and characteristics and assigning to those masculine and feminine descriptors where they're not intended to be.

The things like -- you mentioned the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is not supposed to be divided into, well, these are the ones that are feminine, and these are the ones that are masculine. Or even -- like you mentioned courage and boldness, Marcus. Those kinds of things should be demonstrated by both men and women. This sort of bold confidence and trust in God and willingness to sacrifice ourselves, these aren't masculine or feminine traits or characteristics. And so, yes, there are masculine and

feminine responsibilities, but I just don't see these masculine and feminine personality traits or characteristics. And anytime we tell a man you're not being a man because you're exhibiting certain personality traits or characteristics, that is doing a disservice, not only to him, but to other men, and, I think, to the biblical story, as well.

But I really want to get to this idea, before we go to break, that there -- I hear this accusation -- and I've heard this accusation for over a decade now. In 2005, there was a book written -- I don't know if you guys have heard of it, but it was called "*Why Men Hate Going to Church.*" I don't know if either of y'all heard of that book. David Murrow wrote this book, and he was kind of ahead of his time, I think, because over the last five or six years, I've really seen this idea that church is too feminine, and that was his main argument. Church is too feminine and we need to make church more masculine, and then, that way, men would like coming to church. And so he would really like, I think, the video that I saw this week of the tanks and the Jeeps and the dirt bikes. But he said this, and it goes to everything we've been talking about. One of his quotes in the book says, "A Christ who is all grace cannot stir the masculine soul. Deep down, men long for a harsh affection, the love of a coach who yells at his players to give every ounce of effort; the love of a drill sergeant who pushes his recruits to the limits of human endurance; the love of a teacher who demands the impossible from his students. As Western society feminizes, it's getting harder for men to find this kind of love. The Lion of Judah offers harsh father love in abundance, yet he's becoming an endangered species in the modern church." So he makes the argument that the grace part of Jesus appeals to the women,

but an all-grace Jesus will not appeal to masculine men, that we need the coach who will kind of kick us around a little bit.

So what do you make of the accusation that the church has become too feminine with its emphasis on things like grace and kindness and mercy and love? Marcus, we'll kind of start with you on that one.

MARCUS: Sure. Man, he emptied the clip, so to speak, if I'm going to use a masculine metaphor on our conversation. The problem is, for me, I think that we're in trouble if we swing this pendulum too far to either side. Our ability for Jesus to stir us and for God to be prime in our lives always comes with wrestling with the tension between justice and mercy, and I don't think we do well to remove one from the other. So if his critique was just going to stop at, you know, we only talk about this one thing and we need to balance this conversation, then that I could agree with. But if he is suggesting that what we really need is just to return to nothing but fire and brimstone for people, that's the only way you're going to stir men, then I think it does violence to the passion narrative 110 percent.

You cannot read the gospels and watch Jesus both, at times, be very bold and check his opponents, also sometimes be very bold and be that coach that he's talking about with the disciples, and yet see him lay his life down in sacrifice, which is the peak irony for me for a statement or a quote like that. Even in the most brash, bravado-infused narratives, we, the manly men, cannot get away from the idea of self-sacrifice, for your brother especially, being the ultimate in manliness. So his claim here does not really track with me. It's willfully ignorant of the full idea of who Jesus was and what he lived out and what we ought to be aspiring to be, as well. So I don't

mean to go off topic there, but I couldn't help but think, man, you have to take one with the other and hold these in tension.

WES: That's a great point. Chase?

CHASE: I love your thoughts, Marcus. I don't necessarily think they were off topic. I thought they were spot on there. There were a couple things popped in my mind as you spoke, and living in the tension between Jesus flipping money tables over and saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." So how do you look at Jesus and how do you address a culture and balance both of those two scenes from the biblical narrative in a way that creates somebody that wants to be like him? Because our goal is not to create women that are women and men that are men, but to create humans that are Jesus. And as we do that, I think we see -- another verse that popped in my mind was in James chapter 2. I was teaching the last couple weeks through James and the idea that mercy triumphs over judgment, and if we look at mercy as though it's a feminine quality, then it would be superior to what you refer to as our male bravado, this masculinity we want to carry on. And so if we're not looking at things equally, then we're going to put women above men in that particular context.

When I think about just that question, in general, the accusation and how the emphasis seems to be on things like love, grace, mercy, and kindness, well, that's what we want to receive. Nobody -- I mean, I don't know a lot of people, save maybe that author, that doesn't want to receive those things. I don't want people to be mean to me. And so the idea that men come in with this harsh judgment kind of attitude -- to me, judgment creates superiority because there is one judge. He's above all of us. And so

when we take the seat as judge to say this is the way something has to be within a given masculine/feminine kind of conversation, then we're creating inequality, and I don't think that was the purpose behind what Jesus was doing. And so trying to balance that narrative -- again, I love what you said there. We've got to find balance in between the flipping of the tables and the cross of "Father, forgive them."

WES: Yeah. Well, let's go to break, but before we do, Chase, I love that point that you made, that the goal is not to make men more masculine or women more feminine. The goal is to make people like Jesus. I've always suggested that we read the Bible with a cruciform hermeneutic, and it makes me think that, really, what we need to be promoting is a cruciform masculinity and a cruciform femininity, and that really needs to be the goal.

Let's go to break, and we'll be right back.

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offer by going to RadicallyChristian.com/Logos. Okay. Thanks for listening. Now back to our Bible study.

WES: Okay. Well, I'm really enjoying this conversation so far, and just to kind of recap, we're kind of talking about this idea that churches have become too feminine, and because of the overemphasis on qualities and characteristics and activities that are deemed to be feminine, it has pushed men, especially young men, away. And there's been a lot of suggestions here recently I've read. Again, a book back in 2005 by David Murrow about why men hate going to church makes the suggestion that churches should become more masculine in order to attract young men. But as recently as -- Jordan Peterson had a video not too long ago. I don't know if you guys saw that, but it was a video that was addressed to Christian churches, and there were some good things that he had to say, but this was also part of it, was that churches needed to appeal to young men. In fact, here's a quote from that Jordan Peterson video. He said, "The Christian church is there to remind people, young men included, and perhaps even first and foremost, that they have a woman to find, a garden to walk in, a family to nurture, an ark to build, a land to conquer, a ladder to heaven to build, and the utter, terrible catastrophe of life to face stalwartly in truth, devoted to love and without fear."

And so there's this sort of common theme right now that churches need to become more masculine, and if they become more masculine, they will be able to attract young men. So what do you think of that proposal, that churches should focus more on masculinity and attracting men by

becoming more masculine? Chase, we'll kind of throw it to you first.

CHASE: I think the most important thing in answering that question is whose definition of masculinity that we use, because if we're going to go by the author you just quoted's definition, the church is going to look very different than if we appeal to young men based on either a different culture or just a different person. Any given person might have a different definition of masculinity.

As Marcus was saying earlier, I don't think anybody would refer to Jesus as feminine, and so if we went with Jesus' definition, or as his person is defined in scripture -- if we use that as our definition of masculinity, then I think, sure, we should use that, again, finding the balance between him being the ultimate judge but also the ultimate liberator, and so he's on both sides of the coin as far as if we're going to look at masculinity. I mean, when you -- there's certain professions in our culture -- we say a judge or a doctor, oftentimes, it's -- immediately we think of a man, and there's other professions we think of a woman. And so when I think about whose definition of masculinity -- if we start with Jesus, then the church really is described in scripture as his bride, and so people who are saying the church needs to be more masculine -- well, the church is described as a bride in scripture, and so how do we reconcile that with our viewpoint of what masculinity is?

And so as far as reaching more people and becoming more masculine within the church, I think those qualities of masculinity need to reflect that of a bride, that of submission to the ultimate authority and what Jesus describes as his church and what she should look like -- and she's always

referred to as a "she" in scripture. Again, it's not because of anatomy, but because of a persona that femininity and masculinity, I think, carry with it. And so that submissive nature of -- if we're going to create masculinity as a church, I think it's going to involve understanding the definition and the difference, perhaps, biblically of what those things look like.

WES: Great points. Marcus?

MARCUS: Yeah, I have to agree with what you just said, Chase. It's going to depend on the definition. So much of this conversation even, you know, springs from, really, a poorly defined understanding of what masculinity and femininity are. We talked about weaponizing them against one another earlier, so before we could ever say something like, "We need to be more masculine if we're going to attract men," we have to understand what we're saying and what that really means and does that track with what scripture says masculinity or femininity is?

I think that it's impossible to have this conversation without understanding that sin has distorted masculinity and femininity. And so the beginning of the Peterson quote, you know, I could agree with, you know, the first two or three parts. These are roles given to me by God that I'm supposed to fulfill, yeah. I ultimately hope to be in the garden and walking with God, and, yeah, I'm supposed to go and be joined to my wife and pursue life and steward those things well. That is part of my role. But in the back half, I think you see this distortion, and there is, without a doubt, a hole in this area in our culture right now. I don't suggest that it hasn't always been there. There have been different ways of dealing with it societally and different ideas of how we cope with these things and put them back together.

I would say the emergence of the sorts of voices like we've kind of talked about on this podcast today is evidence that this is something that we do need to talk about, so I'm not just trying to do away with the notion of saying no, this is all silly and it's just made up and fabricated, but I do think that it will benefit us to have more conversations like these and compare that ideal for masculinity up against Jesus, and compare that idea for femininity up against the scripture and Jesus, and see that we can't take a more cruciform approach than we have traditionally.

Unfortunately, I would say that, you know, we have a tendency to either err on an extremely oppressive kind of fundamentalist understanding of what these two things mean and what that means for people and their roles and who they are; as Wes has talked about a lot already, just brute force of oppressing these characteristics on them. And then you have, you know, a radically progressive stance that says, well, there's really no difference between people at all and we get to decide what these things are. I think they're both really woefully inadequate ways to try and address the distortion that has happened as a result of the fall. So that's what I would say in response to this.

WES: Yeah, I think that that's such a great point. I think it's so important that these ideas have been distorted by the fall. And, again, as you said, in the Peterson quote, the lines that really bothered me were things like -- that the church -- the idea that the church has a responsibility to tell men that they have a land to conquer, that they have a ladder to heaven to build. These are not Christian ideals, conquering lands and building ladders to heaven, but they are very much what fallen masculinity has done. And even

just reading those words -- I can't tell you how -- in a sense, he's right.

When I read Eldredge's book, "*Wild At Heart*," as a young man, when I read "*Why Men Hate Going to Church*," the book that I was quoting from earlier, these ideas resonated with me. They resonated with me because, again, I want to be a man. I want to be a real man. I want to be the man who conquers. I want to be the man who takes the hill. I want to be the man who does these things. But I also have to recognize that much of that resonance is resonating with me because of my flesh, not because of the Spirit of God. It is resonating with me because of my fallenness.

And there is a sense in which if you play videos of tanks and Jeeps and dirt bikes, it will appeal to men, but what side of men is it appealing to? Not only does it not appeal to every man -- there's a good point to be made in that -- but it appeals to my flesh. My flesh wants to kill and destroy. My flesh wants to conquer. My flesh wants to dominate. That's the part of me that's supposed to be mortified. It's supposed to be put to death and crucified. It's not the part of me that is supposed to be celebrated. And so if churches celebrate that aspect of humanity, but in this case, specifically, masculinity, that is fallen and broken and sinful, and say, hey, we're going to use this and we're going to capitalize on this to appeal to men, what we're really doing is -- I mean, it would be like a doctor trying to attract patients by offering candy or free alcohol or drugs, you know, or something like that, that it appeals to exactly what the doctor is trying to address and change and fix. And so we're appealing to men, I'm afraid, by things that really are related to the flesh rather than the Spirit.

Any other thoughts on sort of the problematic nature of making the

church more masculine? Before we go on to what should we do, any other thoughts on that aspect of it?

CHASE: Yeah. As you were talking there, the whole idea of conquering something and what I see as very problematic in the church, one of men's greatest struggles has to do with sex, and women have become an idol to conquer in so many circles, and when you get into the masculinity/femininity conversation, there is some appeal, I think, to very fleshly people. Like you were just describing, that's the doctor saying, hey, here's something bad so you'll come see me, and the church is not looking for that. The church should not be looking for that.

And so I think about how we appeal -- one of the verses that came to mind as you were speaking there was in I Corinthians 9, where Paul is talking about this race that we're running and how everybody competes, exercises self-control, and one of the greatest challenges for people -- not just men, but I think maybe especially men -- is the idea of dominate yourself. Figure out -- like there's a challenge there to me. It's like why do I like to lift weights? Because I want to see how far I can control my physical body. And when I think about dietary restrictions, am I strong enough, am I manly enough to say no to that dessert for a month? Am I manly enough to say, look, I'm not going to eat meat because of A, B, or C? Can I be a vegetarian? And I'm sure some listeners are going, "This guy is crazy. Nobody should not eat meat." But the point is the same. I want to see, can I dominate my body? My desires that are fleshly, can I dominate that? That has appeal to me because it's a challenge.

And so the fleshly part of trying to attract people to the church to be

more masculine, to me doesn't have any appeal from that standpoint because it almost seems like that's the easy way, and I don't think the church was designed to do that which is easy. And so I want that challenge, and maybe there is -- it's difficult, I think, within the church for us to do that, and so a lot of times we avoid the difficult things. It is going to be difficult, I think, to figure out how do we attract more people. I think that's one of the things we'll talk about in a minute, is how do we take that approach of attracting people without it being something that just attracts or appeals to their flesh?

WES: Yeah. Marcus, any thoughts on that?

MARCUS: I mean, just well said by you both. I don't mean to be Marcus in the middle here, but I just think it's so important that we say really clearly that, you know, if the goal is to fix broken masculinity, then yes, that obviously should be a good goal of the church. We're here to see people healed and bound up and step into their true identity, so not in and of itself do I reject this. But if the goal, like Chase is saying, is to appeal to this warped and broken ideation of masculinity, then no, I disagree with that for sure. So yeah, I think I'll leave it at that for now. I know we've got some more coming up on this as we talk about what to do about it, then, so...

WES: And I think part of this -- as we sort of transition to this last question, I think that part of this -- we have to acknowledge the assumption that sometimes we make in that church should be appealing to everyone, or church will be appealing to everyone, or that Jesus was appealing to everyone. The fact of the matter is Jesus said some things that -- if you were trying to be the stereotypical man or the stereotypical woman and your goal was to be that stereotypical woman or the stereotypical man, what Jesus said

was a real turnoff, and it was like, "Don't say that, Jesus. If you're trying to attract real masculine men and real feminine women, then don't say things like that."

I mean, for instance, Jesus saying, "Turn the other cheek," and, "If someone forces you to go a mile, you should go with them two," I can't even imagine -- if somebody thought -- you know, the zealots -- I mean, these zealots, they are men. They are the masculine men. They are the real men of Jewish society right now, and Jesus said something like that, "Hey, if a Roman soldier forces you to go a mile, surprise him and carry the pack two miles." I mean, that would not seem masculine at all. Allow yourself to be dominated? Allow yourself to be slapped and turn and take some more of it? And if Jesus took the advice of many popular people today, you know, Jesus would have to change his message in order to be appealing to those men who want to dominate and refuse to be dominated by others or refuse to submit to others.

So if this is not the answer, if the answer isn't, hey, the church needs to become more stereotypically masculine in order to appeal to men, how do we appeal to men? What should the church be doing in order to reach out to men? I forget who I started with last time, but Marcus, why don't we start with you, Brother.

MARCUS: I don't pretend to have an answer that can help us fix this in the time that we have allotted today, but I do have some ideas. Hopefully, you'll find them beneficial. I think this is about the church at large placing an emphasis on helping people recover their true identity -- their true identity in Christ and their true identity that would be present in the Edenic state, and I

don't mean that in a woo-woo way. I don't mean that in a -- you know, a believe-and-declare-who-I-am, take-charge-of-your-own-identity kind of way. I mean that these problems stem from the fact that we really don't know who we are, and we're trying to figure out what that's supposed to look like.

We talked a little bit about the garden earlier. I see man and woman sure and confident, walking with God, and the first thing that happens after the fall is they begin to have to produce something to make themselves okay, and it's inadequate. That's one of the first lessons that we lose -- or that we have to learn. We make these fig, you know, coverings. It's not good enough. Something has to die. God has to do it for us. But ever since then, our identities have been inextricably linked to what we produce and how that affects the world around us, and that is still in us today. So for a man to say what makes me a man, what makes me successful, what makes me even more importantly significant is that I have these attitudes, and I don't go around things; I go through things, and this is what makes me valuable in front of God is nothing but a continuation of that pattern that started back in Eden, right?

So I think underneath of this -- and I can only speak from my own personal experience being someone that for many, many years pursued success, what being a successful man looked like in various different avenues, coming to the end of that and realizing that what I really wasn't after was success, per se, but significance. And I think that's what every man truly wants, to be significant, to have a real reason to be, to know what that reason is, to be working towards that and walking through that with God,

and I think the same thing for every woman, as well. I think an emphasis on helping us find what those true identities actually are and lay waste to all of this other baggage that we've built up over the centuries about what it means to be a real man or a real woman, and find out what God is saying about you, who you are personally, individually, and then walk humbly but confidently in that, will help us disarm some of these weapons that we've turned on each other for so, so, so long.

So the way that I would begin to try to appeal to a man with the message of the gospel or the church, or a woman, even, as well, is that that thing that you're trying to accomplish by being this, or you've been told that you will accomplish by being this, is a real problem. It's a real hole. It's real. I'm here to validate that. But there's a much better way, and you can lay down all of this other stuff that has clouded your judgment, caused so many wounds, caused you to burn bridges, caused you not to pursue things that you were passionate about, caused you to feel hurt, caused you to feel guilty just about being who you are, and that's not the case when someone is in Christ. So I'll stop there for now, but that's the direction that I'm moving at this point in time.

WES: Great thoughts. And I love that thought about being significant, and it really reminds me of so many things that Jesus said about greatness and how there's a paradox there for those of us that are Christians and how there is a cruciform greatness that, if you want to be great, you have to become less, and that -- and there's a good news to that, that for a man, you can be great without being ten-foot tall and bulletproof. For a woman, you can be great without being a blond bombshell. You can be great without being what

the culture says you're supposed to be as a man or a woman. You become great by becoming less, by humbling yourself, and taking up your cross and following Jesus, and I do think that that resonates. Ironically, it resonates with quite the different people -- it resonates with the same people that it resonated with in the first century, and that may not be the people that are the stereotypical great ones, as it were.

Chase, let's go to you. What do you think we should do, as the church, to appeal to, or reach, or resonate with young men, especially?

CHASE: It's quite obvious to me that the Spirit has led both of your comments right into my thought process, because as you guys were talking, it just seems like a natural flow as a -- something that we need to do is, one, recognize the church is not Sunday. And I think, with some of the questions we've looked at, sometimes the church has become too feminine and we think about worship songs or what takes place in a building, and the church is so much bigger than this block of land for two hours on a given day.

And so I was having a conversation with a -- I say he's a kid, he's 30 -- this past week, and he's going through a divorce. He's going through some really hard times, just found out some really bad news. And I asked him, I said, "Do you have a community?" And he said, "Well, I've got family." And I said, "Do you have like a faith community?" He's like, "I've thought about church in the last several months just with all that I've been going through." And the appeal that I gave him to the church, I said, "I'm not a church pusher," I said, "but we have found faith community here to be so helpful to us," and I said, "The reason is, is because there are some very successful people at this place, and we all know that we're broken. It's like

there's not a person in our group that wouldn't tell you we are broken." And this guy was experiencing some brokenness in his life, and he said, "That's so beautiful."

And those words right there are not masculine in and of themselves, but they have appeal to somebody who needs to find this cruciform life. Not this male life, this female life, but this ideal of -- cruciform, that's the best word. I love that you started with that word just a few minutes ago. But that's the idea, is that we're bigger than the building, we're bigger than the songs that we sing. It's the way that we live our lives, and it's not masculine, it's not feminine; it's cruciform. And so helping him to see that, and exactly what you guys have said, is the ideal, is what we're shooting for here in helping people to see it's about relationship.

I love what Marcus was saying. Everything he said told me men have to realize it's going to appeal -- relationship has to appeal, and whatever it is, your angle -- some of the notes I had written down here was how do we take people in their current circumstance and help them to see they don't have to change to have value? We can see them as they are and identify the value with the gifts that they have. They don't have to be a preacher. They don't have to be an elder or a deacon, a song leader, a whatever within a building to have value. They can add value to the community because of who they are and because of who God says they are, and, to me, that goes beyond creating masculine or feminine within a community that will help people to see that they belong and that they are significant, not because of a job or a characteristic, but because of who God says they are.

WES: Yeah. Amen. Amen. Guys, this conversation has been so incredibly

rich, and I can't help but think about the beatitudes with everything that y'all have said. And I think that Jesus started his Sermon on the Mount with those beatitudes because it's an upsidedown kingdom that he established, and it resonates not with the people on the top, but the people at the bottom. It resonates with the poor in spirit. It resonates with the meek. It resonates with those who weep. And that's who we're going to appeal to if we're preaching the gospel. We're going to preach to people, we're going to appeal to people, who know that they're broken and that they know they need something that God has to offer, and that's the way we become significant, is by embracing the life that he offers.

So thank you, Brothers, for the way that you lead that, you live that out, and the way you've shared that today. I appreciate you both so much.

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