

Let Boys Be Boys!

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My twenty-one-month-old son Jarod is all boy. His favorite activity, which he demands to do as soon as he wakes up, is to look for school buses during our daily walk around the neighborhood. He can spend hours each day playing with his wooden train set or the dozens of cars and trucks he inherited from his older brother.

His grandfather calls him "Tank." When Jarod decides he wants to do something, he squares his broad little shoulders, leans forward and attacks it, heedless of danger. He has already received three stitches in his forehead in an encounter with the hearth, and at any time he sports several bumps, bruises and scrapes from accidents involving wagons, scooters, bikes, cupboards, tables, chairs, playpens, toys and other assorted objects. Most of these injuries he smilingly displays on his face. He even points them out by incident.

Beth and I have told him countless times, "Be careful!" "Take it easy!" "Slow down!" "Get down from there!" "Wait! Let me get you off of there!" along with various other warnings, commands and expressions of terror. We are still waiting for the repeated application of the "rod of correction" to drive the foolishness from him (Proverbs 22:15).

On the other hand, Jarod is a friendly, happy, good little boy. Like most little boys, he is full of juice and curious about everything. He plunges into his interests with a zeal and energy that make adults envious. Though his parents consider him unique and special, he is really not that much different from most other boys his age. Boys will be boys!

The War on Boys

Why would anyone want to stifle a boy's natural exuberance and make him into something else? Obviously, it is the parents' responsibility to channel a boy's inclinations in a productive and moral direction, but trying to rewrite his fundamental—even biologically inclined—disposition should be out of bounds. Yet this is what is happening in Western nations under the thumb of radical feminism.

Ironically, it began as a complaint by Harvard University psychologists Carol Gilligan and William Pollack that the American cultural and educational systems discriminated against girls. Citing boys generally higher standardized test scores, particularly in the areas of math and science, educators have worked hard to "bolster" girls' self-esteem and academic performance. As Claudia Kalb remarks in *Newsweek*, "Some of that attention has been interpreted as anti-boy, . . . [while] Gilligan argues that progress for girls isn't necessarily a step backward for boys" (July 10, 2000, p. 52).

In her recent book, *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men*, Christina Hoff Summers blows the whistle on the girl-power movement. The opening paragraphs of an abridgement of her book in the May 2000 *The Atlantic Monthly* (pp. 59-74) capture her contention:

It's a bad time to be a boy in America. The triumphant victory of the U.S. women's soccer team at the World Cup last summer has come to symbolize the spirit of American girls. The shooting at Columbine High last spring might be said to symbolize the spirit of American boys.

That boys are in disrepute is not accidental. For many years women's groups have complained that boys benefit from a school system that favors them and is biased against girls. "Schools shortchange girls," declares the American Association of University Women. Girls are "undergoing a kind of psychological foot-binding," two prominent educational psychologists say. A stream of books and pamphlets cite research showing not only that boys are classroom favorites but also that they are given to schoolyard violence and sexual harassment.

In the view that has prevailed in American education over the past decade, boys are resented, both as the unfairly privileged sex and as obstacles on the path to gender justice for girls. This perspective is promoted in schools of education, and many a teacher now feels that girls need and deserve special indemnifying consideration. "It is really clear that boys are Number One in this society and in most of the world," says Patricia O'Reilly, a professor of education and the director of the Gender Equity Center, at the University of Cincinnati.

The idea that schools and society grind girls down has given rise to an array of laws and policies intended to curtail the advantage boys have and to redress the harm done to girls. That girls are treated as the second sex in school and consequently suffer, that boys are accorded privileges and consequently benefit—these are things everyone is presumed to know. But they are not true.

. . . A review of the facts shows boys, not girls, on the weak side of an education gender gap. The typical boy is a year and a half behind the typical girl in reading and writing; he is less committed to school and less likely to go to college. . . . Data from the U.S. Department of Education and from several recent university studies show that far from being shy and demoralized, today's girls outshine boys. They get better grades. They have higher educational aspirations. . . . Girls, allegedly timorous and lacking in confidence, now outnumber boys in student government, in honor societies, on school newspapers, and in debating clubs. Only in sports are boys ahead, and women's groups are targeting the sports gap with a vengeance. Girls read more books. They outperform boys on tests for artistic and musical ability. More girls than boys study abroad. . . . At the same time, more boys than girls are suspended from school. More are held back and more drop out. Boys are three times as likely to receive a diagnosis of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. More boys than girls are involved in crime, alcohol, and drugs. Girls attempt suicide more often than boys, but it is boys who more often succeed. In 1997, a typical year, 4,483 young people aged five to twenty-four committed suicide: 701 females and 3,782 males.

Biased Research

It does not take long for an observer to detect the obvious differences in the behaviors of boys and girls. Place an equal number of male and female kindergartners in a classroom, and before long, they

will have separated themselves out by sex. The girls will sit quietly talking in a corner or at a table coloring, while the boys will be running around the room, yelling at the top of their vocal range, playing cowboys and Indians and generally wreaking havoc. Seemingly, despite the methods of childrearing, this is just how boys and girls behave.

It is this observation that has resulted in America's present bias toward girls. Researchers concluded, "Since childrearing practices do not seem to make much difference in boys acting like boys and girls acting like girls, it must be either our cultural treatment of boys versus girls or genetics." It is another manifestation of the old nature/nurture debate.

Because feminists in the 1960s did not want to admit differences between males and females, several feminist researchers undertook studies to show that boy and girl babies are essentially the same, notwithstanding their "plumbing." Long-running experiments observing emasculated boys showed that, even without their genitalia, these boys still behaved like boys and desired to do "boy things." To the researchers, the experiment was a failure.

After the repeated failures of the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s and the stalling of the feminist crusade in the 1980s, feminism took a new tack. Instead of trying to prove sameness and thus equality, it began to focus on women's differences and thus superiority. Instead of rallying themselves with the cry, "We can do anything just as well as men!" feminists began to proclaim, "We can do many things better than men!"

With the dawn of the 1990s, feminism began its new campaign by complaining that society victimizes girls. The mainstream press trumpeted the findings of slanted research papers that alleged—on shaky proof—that the present educational system favors boys. Few questioned these reports, leading first to changes in teaching and disciplining methods in the schools and then to legislative action to punish and curtail predominantly boyish behavior.

For instance, some teachers merely tried to spend more time instructing girls. However, it did not end there. Boys in a San Francisco school are regularly mandated to participate in feminist forums—"made to enjoy quilting and forced to listen as girls vent their anger at males," writes John Leo in the July 17, 2000, edition of *U.S. News and World Report*. "Some schools," he maintains, "use the Bem Androgyny Scale—named for feminist psychologist Sandra Bem—to measure success in getting rid of those pesky masculine traits in boys."

This feminist campaign is also responsible for many of the broad zero-tolerance rules and laws passed in the last decade. Ordinary boy behavior is now considered inherently anti-social and even sexist. A boy pecking a little girl on the cheek—not to mention the unavoidable teasing, ridicule and making unflattering remarks young boys engage in—is sexual harassment, and kindergarten boys playing cops and robbers with finger-guns is punishable by suspension from school as violent behavior. Such exuberant behavior, when linked with "poor academic performance," is often enough for a recommendation that a boy be put on Ritalin.

Sadly, educators have ignored the well-known and common-sense fact that boys learn and express themselves and learn differently from girls. Boys are generally a few years behind girls in reading and writing but a few years ahead in math. Boys tend to learn through hands-on activities, while girls often excel in bookwork and verbal exercises. Boys express themselves through physical play and

noise, yet girls emote and talk their way through situations and problems. One way is not "better" than another—just different. If a teacher's methods account for these differences, boys' and girls' learning abilities are evenly matched.

An End-Time Problem

To a person without a solid spiritual foundation, whether boys grow up masculine or not makes little difference. Thus, humanists accept androgyny and homosexuality without a quibble, since they feel these are just other "lifestyle choices." To God and His church, however, taking the boy out of boys presages a sea change in society for the near future.

God through Isaiah foretells of this emasculation of men in the end time:

For behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah . . . the mighty man and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, and the diviner and the elder; the captain of fifty and the honorable man, the counselor and the skillful artisan, and the expert enchanter. . . . When a man takes hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, "You have clothing; you be our ruler, and let these ruins be under your hand," in that day he will protest, saying, "I cannot cure your ills, for in my house is neither food nor clothing; do not make me a ruler of the people." . . . [T]hey declare their sin as Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves. . . . Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him. As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths." (Isaiah 3:1-3, 6-7, 9, 11-12)

The prophet paints a picture of a society that, because of its rejection of God's way, has lost its ability to produce leaders in every sector. Someone must lead, thus the leadership positions are filled by children—immature, inexperienced and self-involved adults who act like children—and women. These "women" can be literal women, or they can represent men who act like women.

The example Isaiah gives in verses 6-7 is quite picturesque. He imagines a group of people living amidst the crumbling remains of a once-proud city. One of them, unwilling himself to lead, implores his brother to take the responsibility of ruling those left after the repeated disasters that strike a wicked, disintegrating nation. The brother glances around and says, "Don't look at me! I've got nothing to offer! I have no idea how to even begin to fix this mess!" One is left with the impression that, since no one will stand up to lead, the desolation will continue.

God clearly points the finger of blame directly at the "women" who lead the people. They cause the nation to go astray in two ways: by implementing ungodly programs themselves or by weakly standing by as others do so. We have seen this happen in the nations of Israel over the past several decades, and the results are plain: They have rent the fabric of society and torn the nations' religious underpinnings to shreds.

Ezekiel sees a similar vision:

"Son of man, say to [Israel]: 'You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.' . . . Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain. Her prophets plastered them with

untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' when the LORD had not spoken. . . . So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; . . . and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 22:24, 27-28, 30-31)

Among all Israel, God can find no man who will lead the people in His way, so He allows the natural processes of destruction and degeneration to occur. Once Israel is sufficiently weak *from her own ungodly ideas and behaviors*, He will send the Assyrian to finish the job (Isaiah 10:5-11).

God has called many out of this imminent disaster to fight spiritual battles (Ephesians 6:11-13), to be prepared to rule and lead in His government that will be set up on this earth when His Son returns (Revelation 5:10; 20:6). In a sense, He has called us—not to stand in the gap to right the world's wrongs—but to be prepared to start over and do it properly during the thousand years of Christ's reign.

In the meantime, those of us in the church with children need to be aware of the bias in the world against boys. If we raise our boys into strong, masculine leaders, what a light will shine in the darkness of these last days!