

# MEN OF GOD

*growing men's  
ministry in the  
local church*



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Men of God  
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**New Zealand:** www.thegoodbook.co.nz

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ISBN:9781907377433

Cover design by Steve Devane

Printed in the UK



## PREFACE

When this book was first published, it was conceived as an response to misplaced thinking about how churches should encourage Christian men and help them to grow in their faith.

Facing a widespread loss of identity for men, we have been encouraged to “find our inner Tarzan” by primal screaming round a camp fire, or to delve deeply within our souls (or DNA) to rediscover what we should truly be. This book is not primarily concerned with gender issues. Our guiding principle in it’s development was to ask the question: what does it mean for modern men to *know Christ*. We are concerned to help clarify how God would have his sons live for him in our modern age.

To do this, our instinct as Christians should be to encourage each other to apply the Scriptures to the particular challenges, opportunities and responsibilities we face. This book is our humble offering to this end, and it is published in the hope that it will stimulate fresh thinking among those concerned for men’s ministry in the local church.

The authors are experienced Christians, but all contributions are offered by men who, above all else, know themselves to be weak, but forgiven, sinners. It is split into three parts.

**Part One** seeks to re-establish our confidence in the gospel as the engine of any ministry to men: to clarify the content of the gospel according to Scripture and then to explore its impact on

how ministry among men operates in the local church. It is vital to understand that, without the gospel, what we do week by week in our churches will inevitably become *man-centred* rather than *Christ-centred*, and so inevitably lack the power to save or change men for Christ.

**Part Two provides briefer chapters exploring the Bible's teaching on many aspects of life that Christian men struggle with.** We are convinced that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God [primarily the leader, but including us all] may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). The Bible therefore tells us everything we need to know from God for living as men in God's world! So each chapter begins with some biblical research before proceeding to explain principles of application, and then finally to the nuts and bolts: identifying good practical examples and case studies for the day-to-day realities we face. There are Bible study and discussion questions provided at the end of each of these chapter, in the hope that this section could provide the basis for studying in a men's group.

**Part Three aims to give practical ideas for starting and running different kinds of groups and ministries for men, gleaned from many different sources.** Here is a treasure trove of ideas, old and new, for initiating and refreshing our evangelism and discipling of men. We want to help mobilize church leaders and members to co-operate in developing vigorous and sustainable ministries to men.

This resource was first developed for the London Men's Convention, and this revised and updated version has been developed for use throughout the world

*Trevor Archer and Tim Thornborough.*



## INTRODUCTION: WHY MEN'S MINISTRY?

*Richard Coekin*

**S**ome people will question the need for any special gospel ministry to men, in spite of the widespread pattern of the absence of men in church. In truth, the need has never been greater for specific ministries to men, because the need is greater than ever for godly Christian men:

- ★ **If we have wives**, they need our sacrificial love and upbuilding leadership in a society racked by the agony of adultery and divorce.
- ★ **If we have daughters**, they need our tenderness and warmth to help them adjust to mature femininity.
- ★ **If we have unbelieving friends and colleagues**, they need the visible witness of a life transformed by God's Spirit through God's Word to draw them to God's Son. They need to hear from us, perhaps for the first time in language they can understand, of how to be saved from an eternity in hell to an eternity in heaven.
- ★ **If we belong to a church**, it will need our committed service, prayer and leadership; and perhaps above all...
- ★ **If we have sons**, they need us more than anyone else! Our boys are growing up in a culture more hostile than ever to the ways

of Christ, and they need our guidance, example and encouragement

In truth, the answer to these pressing needs has never been very far away. We have just either been too timid to grasp it, or else have been seduced by high-sounding alternatives, which, of course, have failed to deliver. The answer, of course, is **the gospel of Jesus Christ**, and the means of Christian growth that God provides in Him and through Him. They could be summarised under three headings:

★ **By the personal encouragement of other Christian men.** We can all relate to Elijah at Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19) who thought he was alone in worshipping the LORD. This is simply there are thousands of like-minded men who have not bowed the knee to pagan idols, and who struggle with the same things that you do. One of God's gifts to us in the Gospel is the fellowship of such men. And often we feel lonely, isolated, alone, because we fail to use this gift by cutting ourselves off from other believers. Not only do we need their support and encouragement, but they need yours as well.

★ **Through excellent Bible teaching.** We always have something new to learn from God's Word, but mostly, we need to *remember* what we already know. Reading, thinking about and applying the scriptures to the details of our lives is what will give us clarity and integrity in our Christian lives. Unless we fill our minds with God's truth, our minds will fill with the messages of our fallen world. Like the world we will become rebellious and indifferent to our sin. We will be swallowed up in its suffocating materialism and pluralism. And false teaching, which only leads to pride, will invade our lives and churches.

★ **By praying together.** The Gospel teaches us that we are helpless lost and dead, and that we are only made alive by the gracious awakening power of God. Prayer expresses our genuine dependence upon the mercy and grace of our loving heavenly Father. When we do not pray we show that we are depending on our own strength and ability to achieve things – something that perhaps men excel at to our cost.

If we ask what the goals of a local church men's ministry should be, they could not be better summarized than by the writer to the Hebrews:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. **Hebrews 10:19-25**

Chapters 1-10 of Hebrews establish that God's Son is the better mediator between God and his people than all the prophets, angels and leaders of Israel, and a better priest offering better sacrifices to establish the better covenant arrangements in which we now live as Christians. In view of this, we have two great privileges:

**1. We have "confidence" to enter the holy places of God's presence.**

We have the assurance of living our lives permanently in his presence and the privilege of constant bold access to God in prayer.

## **2. We have a great priest over the house of God.**

Not only was Christ the sufficient sacrifice for our sins then, but he is now permanently interceding for us at God's right hand, a "friend at court" looking out for us constantly.

In other words, we have **permanent access to God** and **permanent acceptance by God**. In the light of these twin privileges won for us by Christ, what shall we do as Christian men? Here are the three aims or goals that the writer would commend for us:

★ **Let us draw near to God (v 22).** Let's enjoy the privilege of consciously living in the presence of almighty God, cared for, provided for, by our heavenly Father, entitled to speak with him in the throne room of the universe at any time. Men can be crippled by our awareness of guilt, failure and fear; shy of whole-hearted daily commitment to God. We need to hear repeatedly about Christ, so that our hearts will be warmed with assurance of faith, cleansed from a guilty conscience, washed clean through the sacrifice of Christ. **Let us encourage men before anything else to draw near to God in lives of worship, reassured that we are purified by Christ.**

★ **Let us hold fast to our hope (v 23).** The gospel is the promise of great blessings to come with Christ's kingdom. The next chapter reminds us of how the faith of God's people has always meant enduring and living in hope. As men, we are familiar with this notion of endurance for a prize in the world of sport. Whether in modest personal targets or the glory of Grand Slam and World Cup triumphs, we know that glory in the future requires dedicated training, self-denial and pain now. Let us encourage men to grip on tightly to the promise of glory in the new creation. **Let us talk not just about life now but also about life then.** There will be pain in our families, marriages, churches, friendships and careers, but we need to be constantly

encouraged to hang on for the sake of the prize that awaits us in Christ.

★ **Let us consider how to stir up one another (v 24).** We need to think carefully and prayerfully about spurring each other on to love and good deeds – to provoke, challenge and encourage one another in godliness. Men can often be more honest and open with other men. So let us not neglect to meet together in our church groups—whether from pathetic laziness, crippling cynicism, arrogant individualism or depressed defeatism. As the coals in a fire quickly cool when withdrawn from the grate, but become hot once more in combination with others, so we men need to meet together to consider how to stir up one another.

Above all, let us be **"encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near"** (v 25). These aims of drawing near to God, holding fast to our hope and considering how to stir each other up should make our ministry **God-centred, future-centred, encouragement-centred**. This is the kind of ministry that God approves and which men will enjoy. To Him be all the glory.

# 1

## WHAT'S THE DRIVING FORCE?

Men and the Gospel

*Richard Coekin*

Nothing gets the testosterone flowing like a big car. It may be a caricature, but to most men there's nothing like the powerful throaty engine of a Corvette or an Aston Martin to really get the juices pumping. Many young lads dream of buying an ordinary banger and putting in a monster engine, beefing up the suspension and feeling a little car go like a rocket.

Even at a more dignified age, normally civilized men will drool over the big engine in a company car and stay up late to watch a petrol-head pundit floor the accelerator of the latest Ferrari on the roads of Monte Carlo. Back in the real world of our ordinary lives it can seem pretty depressing driving a "sensible" but underpowered diesel. To really enjoy driving, we want a big engine as the driving force.

The primary aim of this book is to support local churches in their gospel ministry to men. Many men, wedged between the responsibilities of work and home, and the demands of leisure and friends, struggle to find the time and energy to really get to grips with their Christian lives. They need the support of their

local church ministry to do this. But what is the engine that will drive such a ministry?

### **Inadequate engines...**

There have been many attempts in recent years to develop ministries specifically aimed at men. They have tried many kinds of engine: for example, the push to get men to be more masculine; or the drive to get men to become “superman” juggling all aspects of life with ease; or the drive to get men to become powerful leaders in the home, at work and in church. But, while some of these may be valid subsidiary aims and hopes of a men’s ministry, if they displace the gospel as the driving force of the work, the ministry will soon lose impetus and direction and will lack God’s power to change lives. These alternative engines lack the power to sustain a men’s ministry. A powerful engine has been taken out and replaced with something ultimately smaller, underpowered and depressing.

We need to start by realizing that the driving force—the powerful engine—of any ministry to men, as indeed of any Christian ministry, must be the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Such an approach may not appear too exciting at first. The external bodywork may not look impressive. But with the gospel as the engine of men’s work, by God’s grace, it will be deeply effective – and it might even go like a rocket.

The aim of this opening chapter is to re-establish confidence in *the gospel* as the engine of a local church ministry to men. First, to clarify what the Bible says the gospel is, and then to clarify the effect of this gospel upon a local church ministry to men. This section is deliberately more thorough and stretching because this is the engine that will drive everything else. It may be more rewarding for some to study the sections individually or in a group on separate occasions. But let’s put the right engine back at the heart of our local church ministry to men.

### **What is the Gospel?**

Since the gospel is the power of God for salvation, it is vital for ourselves and others to know exactly what it is. We may already understand it superficially, but there is a joy and maturity in understanding its depth. And some of us may be in for a shock when we discover that the gospel is not what we thought it was!

The New Testament word “gospel” (from which we get words like evangelism and evangelical) means “good news”. It is news, a verbal message. The gospel is not just what God has done, but his message explaining what he has done. Thus the gospel is not something that can be done, but something that must be proclaimed and understood. The word “gospel” was familiar to first-century Christians from popular usage and from the Old Testament. In the Roman Empire the word was popularly used of the news of a great military victory or great political news. But the more important background is the Old Testament.

### **The Old Testament promise**

We would never dream of turning to the last few chapters of a Grisham novel expecting to understand or enjoy the end of the story without knowing the beginning! We’d be bound to miss significant events, and we’d be utterly confused about the identity of the characters or the meaning of the plot. Likewise with the gospel. Only to read its descriptions in the New Testament is to miss the vital preliminary information provided by God in the Old Testament.

In the beginning, God excluded humanity from his presence for the unbelieving disobedience of our ancestors. **But graciously, God promised Abraham a land, a people and his blessing: the kingdom of God in which all the families of the earth could find blessing (Gen 12:1-3). This promise is the “gospel” (Gal 3:8-9).** This word “gospel” was therefore used in translating the Old Testament where it speaks of announcing God’s great victory

in establishing this kingdom forever (See, for example, **Isaiah 40:9-11** and **52:7-10**).

From such texts it is clear that the Old Testament promised the gospel that God would come in power to bring peace, happiness and salvation by **redeeming his people from the exile he had justly imposed on them and gathering them tenderly to himself in his kingdom**.

In summary, the gospel of the Old Testament is the promise that God would come, redeem his people from exile in bondage and bring them into the blessings of his kingdom. But who could fulfil such a role?

### **The gospel is about God's Son**

The New Testament announces this Old Testament promise to be fulfilled when God the Son mercifully came to rescue his people from our exile from him, and to bring us to himself through the redeeming work of his death and resurrection. Jesus proclaimed himself the one anointed to proclaim this “good news to the poor” and “liberty to the captives” (**Is 61:1-3; Lk 4:18-21**) through liberation from bondage to Satan, sin and death by his death and resurrection (and not in whatever kind of social liberation we might campaign for).

In **Romans 1:1-6**, the apostle Paul helpfully spells out what the apostolic gospel is, before explaining why the people of the world need it:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. **Romans 1:1-6**.

Notice that the gospel is:

- **the gospel of God:** it is God's great announcement to his world. Not a human message to be questioned or adapted according to taste; it is God's gospel that is reliable, important and unalterable.
- **promised beforehand:** the New Testament gospel is not a novelty! Its terms were already clear in the Old Testament promises. New Testament authors are simply amplifying Old Testament themes with the person and work of Christ. They assume that we'll consult the Old Testament to understand him e.g. as “Son of Man”, or “Son of David” (**Dan 7** or **2 Sam 7**). And since the gospel of God's kingdom established by Christ is the central theme of both Old and New Testaments, every part of the Bible is related in some way to it and needs to be understood in the light of it (**2 Tim 3:15-17**).
- **concerning his Son:** God's gospel is all about Jesus. It is “the gospel of his Son” (**Rom 1:9**) or “the gospel of Christ” (**1 Cor 9:12**). While God the Father is the origin of this gospel, and God the Holy Spirit the promoter of this gospel, the subject and content of this good news is God's Son Jesus. When we speak of God the Father or God the Holy Spirit, as also when we speak of other great biblical themes concerning our sin or our church, or our own experiences, we will be speaking of important truths—but they are not the gospel! If we are not talking about God's Son, we are not talking about the gospel. We need to be aware that captivating talks full of witty illustrations and gripping anecdotes still need the gospel concerning God's Son if anyone is to be genuinely saved through them!

## The gospel proclaims who Jesus is

Notice what the gospel says about Jesus:

- **descended from David according to the flesh:** This is to proclaim Jesus as the great promised saviour king of God's eternal kingdom—the Christ. He is the Son of David who would also be the Son of God, (the king who would be chosen by God as his “Anointed” or “Messiah” or “Christ”) who was promised to David in **2 Samuel 7**.
- **He was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead:** This gospel proclaims Jesus as the risen Lord, the divine ruler and judge of all the earth, declared so by his resurrection. The declaration that Jesus is “the Son of God” is not just that Jesus is divine (He is of course—and always has been—God the Son, the second person of the one triune God). Rather, it is to proclaim that, as promised to the king of **Psalm 2**, “you are my Son; today I have become your father,” Jesus has been appointed to be the eternal king, as close to God as a son to his father. God the Son, who is the Christ, was appointed the Son of God, i.e. the Lord, our ruler and judge, by his resurrection. (The gospel is defined in similar terms in **2 Tim 2:8**).

## Jesus is Christ our Lord

To summarize this gospel of God concerning his son, Paul uses a phrase repeated throughout the New Testament: “Jesus Christ our Lord”. The name “Jesus” was the name of the ordinary, historical Nazarene man. The name “Christ” (or Messiah) means God’s “anointed” or “chosen” ruler descended from David. The name “Lord” is the name continually used to translate the name of God in the Old Testament. It seems Paul uses “Jesus Christ our Lord” to summarize what he’s just said.

**The gospel is God’s fantastic declaration that Jesus (the crucified Nazarene) is Christ (the promised saving king) our Lord (the divine ruler and judge), God coming to establish the king-**

**dom of God, as he promised in the Old Testament.** The gospel is God’s announcement that Jesus has been appointed to the role. (We find this gospel declaration of who Jesus is everywhere in the New Testament, e.g. Peter concludes his sermon on the day of Pentecost: “God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” **Acts 2:36**.)

To summarise, it is plain then that the gospel proclaims who Jesus is: that Jesus is Christ our Lord.

## The gospel proclaims what Jesus did

In 1 Cor 15:1-6, the apostle Paul again clarified the apostolic gospel; but this time not so much concerning who Jesus is, but what Jesus did! Who Jesus is (his person) is expressed and revealed in what Jesus did (his work)! His glorious status as Christ our Lord is expressed in his glorious achievements:

*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. **1 Cor 15:1-6***

Notice that this is the gospel “by which you are being saved if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain (v 2). The apostle was concerned that his readers were holding to the true gospel, for it is possible to believe something that is not the true gospel and so not be saved. It is vital to realize that the gospel is not whatever variation of Jesus we prefer (and we cannot propose unity with others simply upon a com-

mon belief in Jesus unless we are clearer as to what kind of Jesus is believed in! (see **2 Cor 11:3-4**).

The gospel by which we are saved proclaims particular things about who Jesus is and what Jesus did. We may disagree upon less important details of Jesus' ministry, but there are certain non-negotiable elements, fundamental events in Jesus' life which we must believe and rely on to be saved. If we don't, we aren't! While we can say that we preach "him", the apostle here clarifies what is essential to believe and to preach about him:

Notice that there are four events in Jesus' life, divided into two pairs of events. The second of each pair is the evidence which proves the first. The first pair:

<b>"Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures..."</b>
(proved by)
<b>...that he was buried"</b>

The gospel proclaims that Jesus Christ our Lord died for our sins.

The gospel declares not just the event, but the true meaning of that event. So the gospel declares not only that Christ died (lots of unbelievers know this) but that he died "for our sins" (i.e. as a sacrifice, representatively suffering the punishment for our sins as our substitute to satisfy God's holy character). And the gospel declares that he died "in accordance with the Scriptures" (i.e. as the Old Testament explains it, e.g. as the "Passover" sacrifice offered to satisfy ("propitiate") God's wrath as explained in Exodus 12:1-14, or as the pair of goats either killed or driven out to suffer the punishments due to God's people as explained in the Day of Atonement ceremony of Leviticus 16, or as the suffering servant who was "wounded for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities" as our representative substitute in Isaiah 53:4-6).

This event of his death was publicly demonstrated by his burial. Jesus' death was the central and supreme moment of all of eternity and of Christ's ministry.

The gospel also proclaims that Jesus Christ our Lord rose to be our ruling judge. The second pair of statements declare this:

<b>"...that he was raised on the third day..."</b>
(proved by)
<b>...and appeared to many"</b>

Note that Jesus was **raised**—not just resuscitated with his old body renewed temporarily, nor just reincarnated with his Spirit leaving his old body for a new one, but resurrected – his old body transformed and fitted for eternity. He was raised "in accordance with the Scriptures" (i.e. as the Old Testament explains his resurrection: to be the eternal king, ruling and judging all nations, to begin the new creation of the resurrection age into which all people will be raised to judgement for eternity (unbelievers to torment and God's people to life with him), and to be forever our great high priest interceding for us at the right hand of the Father. The event of his resurrection was publicly demonstrated by his "appearances" to many witnesses.

The gospel plainly declares that Christ died for our sins and rose to rule in the resurrection age. The death and resurrection of Christ (inseparable because the resurrection is the outworking of his death) are the events at the heart of the gospel.

**More simply put, a swap took place.** Christ was treated as if he were me (and punished) so that I can be treated as if I were him (and justified). Christ took our place on the cross and was punished, so that we, dressed in Christ's righteous life, with his pass-papers to eternal life, might go free. Christ swapped places with us.

However, two other events in the ministry of Christ are also said in the New Testament to be part of the gospel: the incarnation and the judgement of Christ.

### **The gospel also proclaims that Jesus Christ our Lord is God**

It is plain from the New Testament that, in order to be saved, we must be convinced that Jesus is God, e.g. “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (**Romans 10:9**)

In his gospel and his first letter, the apostle John insists (contrary to the false teachers that soon emerged) that we must believe that Jesus is the genuinely divine Son of God. In other words, Jesus is not just a king, but God the Son sharing the divine nature of the Father come in genuinely human flesh (and not just a superior man, as Jehovah’s Witnesses or Christadelphians etc. maintain).

Jesus is not merely a “super human” appointed to be king but “our God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (**Titus 2:13**), who is “the fullness of God” (**Col 1:19**) in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (**Col 2:9**) being “the exact imprint” of God’s nature (**Heb 1:3**). The gospels record the signs and wonders done by Jesus to demonstrate his identity as the divine Saviour come in genuinely human flesh. God, the Son, “shrank” or “miniaturized” himself; he did it to reveal his nature in human categories—a life to be witnessed and understood; and he did it to be an ordinary man, able to swap places with ordinary people like us. The gospel proclaims the events of Christ’s incarnate life as well as his death and resurrection. Jesus Christ is the Lord, God in human flesh. The gospel proclaims the incarnation of Christ as well as His death and resurrection.

But there is more...

### **The gospel also proclaims that Jesus Christ our Lord will judge us all**

In **Romans 2:16**, the Apostle writes of “that day, when according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”

In **Revelation 14:7** the eternal gospel is said to be “fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgement has come.” This judgement will be overseen by one “like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand,” who is plainly the risen Jesus, “harvesting” the people of the earth to be thrown into the terrifying “great wine press of the wrath of God” (**Rev 14: 14-20**).

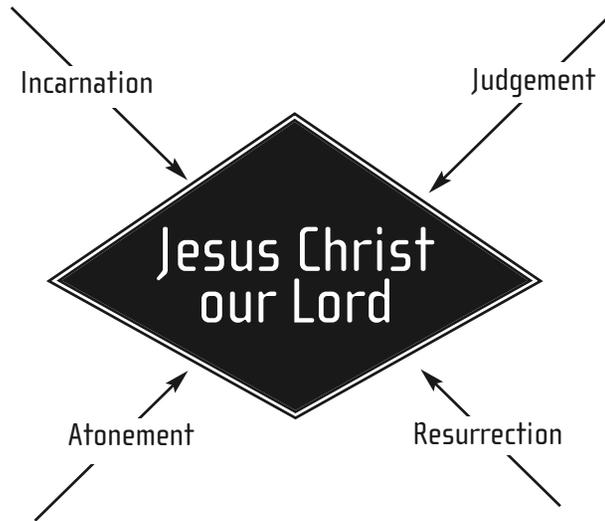
In **Colossians 1**, the gospel is said to concern our future hope as Christians, and the mystery of the gospel is said to be Christ in us, “the hope of glory” (**v27**). Christ’s return to judge will involve both the punishment of the wicked and the vindication of the righteous; the gospel proclaims both the condemnation and the salvation of Christ’s return to judge. There is a future dimension to this gospel.

The gospel concerning Jesus Christ our Lord plainly declares his incarnation, his atonement, his resurrection and his future judgement. These are not different gospels, but all part of the same gospel.

The best way of understanding these differing passages about the gospel concerning who he is, and what he did, is to realize that who he is (his person) is expressed in what he does (his work). In each event of his life, we are looking in at his saving lordship as one might gaze in at a beautiful diamond through different facets.

This explains why different people are drawn to Christ in different ways: some out of a fear of hell (through his judgement) or the attraction of heaven; some drawn to the majesty of the risen Christ (through his resurrection); yet others by the beautiful character and awesome power of Jesus (through his incarnation); others through an understanding of his passionate love shown in the

cross. But although our initial entry points may be different, we must go on to understand and rely on each of these facets if we are to be saved.



But what are the benefits that flow from this gospel?

### The gospel brings the benefits of life in God's kingdom

The benefits of the gospel to those who obey it are truly wonderful:

- **HOPE:** “the hope of the gospel” (Col 1:23), (the promise of being presented before God as holy and blameless and above reproach)
- **PEACE:** “the gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15), (harmony between God and man and between Christians—Jew and Gentile)
- **LIFE:** “our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:10), (eternal life with God now and in the new creation of the resurrection age).

- **RIGHTEOUSNESS:** “in it the righteousness of God is revealed” (Rom 1:17), (the righteousness of God in reckoning to us the righteousness of Christ so that we might appear righteous in his sight).

These and other blessings which come from Jesus through faith in the gospel are the blessings of life in God's kingdom. This explains why, particularly in the Gospels, the gospel that Jesus preaches is the “gospel of the kingdom”. When Mark records Jesus as walking onto centre stage with the words “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”(Mk 1 v 14-15), he was announcing the gospel: that he is the King (Christ and Lord) of God's kingdom; he had come to open the doors of this kingdom by his death on the cross. So this “gospel of the kingdom” is not a different message from the apostle's gospel of Christ crucified (as some suggest). Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection and return bring life in Christ's kingdom: hope, peace, life and righteousness. That the gospel of Christ is the same as the gospel of the kingdom is evident in Acts 28 where we read of the apostle Paul “testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the Prophets” (28:23) and “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (28:31). The gospel of the apostle Paul was never at variance with the gospel of Jesus, for the gospel of Christ, and him crucified, is the same as the gospel of the kingdom.

All these benefits come to anyone who repents (changing one's mind to the depth of our wills to turn from sin to worship God) and believes (trusts, relies and depends upon the gospel being true). Repentance and belief (faith) are the two sides of the same turning (from sin in repentance, to Christ in faith). Repentance and faith are both decisively permanent both when we're born again, and in the ongoing process of responding to God's Word with our lives.

It will be evident from our research that, while there is no single formula for the gospel (clearly the Apostles took every opportunity to teach Christ from the Old Testament and in their own witness), there are essential themes to the gospel that saves which we can now summarize:

The gospel concerns God's Son—who he is, that Jesus (the crucified Nazarene man) is the Christ (the promised saviour king) our Lord (our divine ruler and judge) expressing this saving rule in what he does: the events of his incarnate life, atonement, resurrection and return to judge. At the heart of this gospel is the cross, because everything depended upon Jesus being obedient to death. Who Jesus is and what he did secured for those who believe this gospel the blessings of life in the kingdom of God, as promised in the Old Testament.

Now we know what God's gospel is, let's look at its implications for a local church gospel ministry for men.

## **A Gospel ministry to men**

### **Christ-centred not man-centred**

Our understanding of the gospel will profoundly shape all Christian ministry, and therefore both the evangelistic and the discipling practice of a local church men's ministry. In our evangelism, we need to recall that it is the gospel which is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (**Rom 1:16**). Without this gospel our evangelism to men will be fruitless—no one will be truly saved. In our discipling, likewise, it is the gospel which should shape our lives: "only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (**Phil 1:27**). Without this gospel, our lives will not be pleasing to God, however "manly" we are.

But we need to be aware that the one true gospel is not always popular; the world is threatened by the news that Jesus Christ is our Lord! Our sinful natures will want to avoid the constant challenge of the gospel to submit to Christ. There will be incessant

pressure from all directions to take this gospel out of our men's ministry programmes, or to add things to soften it. The argument will be that we hear this in church (this may or may not be true) and so we don't need it in our men's programme. But this gospel is the power of God. This gospel is God's engine for Christian growth: "in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing – as it also does among you" (**Col 1:6**). But what are the practical implications of allowing this powerful biblical gospel to shape the evangelism and discipling of our ministry to men?

**The primary goal of our men's ministry will be to understand the gospel of Christ before understanding our own masculinity!** Our aim will be to explore what it means that Jesus is Christ our Lord in all areas of our lives as men, before exploring what it means to be male! Our purpose is primarily understanding Jesus as our saving ruler—not understanding the complexities of the Y chromosome.

Of course it will always be helpful to have occasional books, symposia, speakers and debates to clarify the Bible's understanding of manhood. It will always be important in our one-to-one discipling and our prayer triplets and Bible studies to examine the Bible's teaching about masculinity, male "headship" etc. But if our local church men's ministry is dominated by masculinity rather than Christianity it will lack any power to save or shape lives because it will lack the gospel!

**This doesn't for one minute mean we have to be theoretical rather than practical; it does mean that we want to consider the practical implications of the gospel on our lives as men—and not merely the implications of being male.** Such a ministry will still be different from normal church ministry, and will still be precious and special for men, because it will consider the impact of the gospel on the real-life issues of men's lives – as sons, husbands, friends, fathers, at work and in unemployment, on the sports field, in the stands and in the bar.

**The content of our men's ministry will be more concerned with who Jesus is and what he did than with what we are or do!**

It's common in a church ministry to men to organize a programme of breakfast or evening speakers to speak about their Christian life as a famous sportsman, brave soldier, pressured businessman or other manly figures. Of course it can be hugely helpful, and entertaining, to hear how the gospel that Jesus is Christ our Lord has affected a man's working life. But too often the attention is drawn from Christ to the men themselves; from Jesus' person and work to their personality and work (which has no power to save and no authority to shape our lives). Don't get me wrong: I would be the first to want to hear stirring testimonies from famous sportsmen witnessing to Christ's impact on their lives. But let's hear about the impact of the *gospel of Christ* (which is what they want to describe) and not only about winning medals. The gospel has a momentous influence upon the practical conduct of our lives:

Since Jesus is Christ our saving king, we'll look to him in prayer for the merciful help we need in the problems of life; since Jesus is the Lord our ruling judge, we'll look to him to seek his approval and fear his eternal reproach above all; since Jesus became flesh, we'll look to his example and teachings to determine our lives as men, our priorities and ambitions for life and ministry; since Jesus died for our sins, we'll look to his death for the reassurance of forgiveness and security in the light of redundancy, failure and fear; since Jesus is risen to rule, we'll look to his teaching in deciding where to live, work or go to church, in providing a wife or financial needs, or in protecting our children or futures; since Jesus will return to judge, we'll be more concerned for spiritual treasures in heaven than material wealth on earth, and more concerned to share the gospel with our colleagues than we are with business ventures. Let's encourage one another in our one-to-one work to discuss the impact of the gospel upon our lives—not just discuss

our lives! Bible-study will therefore have to be a central feature of all our men's ministries.

### **Who's the hero?**

The burden of this opening chapter is to make Jesus the hero of our ministry to men, and no one else! Too often, men's ministry can, in subtle ways, promote an ideal super-man rather than Christ. They promote the man who is successful in balancing the demands on his time – the man who is faithful to wife, children, colleagues, church and even Bible-reading and prayer, instead of Christ! We can become devoted to becoming like this admirable, moral, successful man rather than like our Lord and Saviour! And as soon as our ministry to men loses the gospel concerning Jesus Christ our Lord, it will lose its power for salvation and shaping our lives. Like a Trans Am or an Aston Martin with its engine removed, it looks powerful but is empty and gutless. Like a Ferrari with an 1100 cc diesel in it, it may look flashy and impressive, but God will not be changing our interior lives in power, because the gospel's gone.

The London Men's Convention is dedicated to supporting local church gospel ministries to men. The chapters that follow are all concerned with the Bible's teaching about various issues of life for men. These chapters will be hugely helpful because they begin with the premise that the gospel is the driving force and fundamental power of ministry to men (as well as providing a more extensive programme of subjects than a man-centred one). Let's ensure that it is God's announcement that Jesus is Christ our Lord that dominates our evangelistic and discipling programmes for the long-term benefit of God changing lives. Let's keep God's powerful engine as the driving force. Let's ensure that our men's ministries are not "man-centred" but "gospel-centred". And to God be all the glory!

## DISCUSS

- Q1.** “What’s the driving force?” Talk through what you think the aims are (if any!) of the existing men’s ministries in your church. What practical steps do you need to take to start shaping them around the gospel of Christ?
- Q2.** What was it that first attracted you to Christ? How has your understanding of the gospel developed since then?
- Q3.** How should the Lordship of Christ affect the way we make decisions and plans?
- Q4.** How should the events of Christ’s life change the priorities of our own?

## 2

## WHAT IT MEANS TO BE GOD’S MAN

Men of God

*Philip Jensen*

**N**ew Man? Macho Man? Career Man? There are many competing calls from our culture for men. But what does it mean to be a Man of God? At the opening of the 21st Century there is great confusion in the Western world as to what it means to be a man. The world’s understanding is in direct opposition to the Bible’s view. A world which excludes God can only define “man” in terms of “biological man”, “sensual man” or “economic man”, an incredibly narrow outlook, which, in practice, means that man can never rise above himself. The secular philosopher Alexander Pope wrote, “The proper study of mankind is man”, an entirely logical conclusion for the humanist in the absence of a Personal and Creator God—but one full of futility and ultimately utterly devoid of hope’.

Conversely, it is this same Creator God who defines what it means for man to be a man. The Bible describes man in relational terms: creature and Creator, husband and wife, father and son, citizen and neighbour. Man’s fundamental relationship is to be with God the Creator, through whom all other relationships find their place and meaning. It is only in this relationship that the Christian man has with God through Christ that we really under-

stand what it means to be a man. Therefore, the proper study of mankind is not mankind but Jesus, the man of God.

But what does it mean to be a 'man of God'? The phrase occurs 80 times in the Bible. The "man of God" in the Old Testament was God's appointed leader to execute God's works as God's agent e.g. Moses, David. There was often a militaristic undertone to the calling and task. In the New Testament, on the only two occasions the phrase is used, Paul highlights this "warrior" theme to Timothy. (1 Timothy 6:11-12 "you man of God .... fight the good fight" and in 2 Timothy 3:17 "that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work"). Thus in Bible thinking, in gospel terms, the "man of God" is a warrior engaged in a war.

Hymns of an earlier generation reflected this biblical imagery. "Soldiers of Christ arise" and "Fight the good fight". Today, we tend to downplay the fact that in the Old Testament God is known as the "God of Hosts", that the judges and kings of Israel were called to subdue nations and that the Messiah would dash to pieces the princes of nations! Along with this, we have also tended to lose sight of the warfare to which the "man of God", the Christian, is called today – namely one of spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6).

The Christian man is not called upon to fight other men for the cause of Christ but rather to fight against the spiritual enemies of God—"the principalities and powers".

To battle against not the symptoms of man's problems but the disease itself that is destroying the world, namely sin.

In order to wage this warfare, Christian men are called to put on the full armour of God—truth and righteousness, the gospel of peace and faith, the Word of God and prayer. (Ephesians 6). The Christian warrior is not to be armed with the weapons of this world but with spiritual weaponry necessary for the spiritual battle. The "man of God" will need courage and perseverance, tenacity and patience to fight this fight. It is of course the calling of every Christian, but particularly of Christian men. We are to fight

in three ways using the three weapons at our disposal: prayer, holiness and the Scriptures.

### **1. Prayer**

*'I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling'* 1 Timothy 2:8

This is primarily how men are to act and fight. The emphasis is on praying. The important thing is not posture but purity, not the "lifting" but the "holiness" of the hands! In context, Paul is addressing how men and women are to behave in church. He is making the point that prayer is primarily the responsibility of the men. Men are to be prayerful; this is one of the chief ways men are to fight the good fight.

The temptation for men in the home is to want to rule without taking responsibility, and in the church to seek the submission of others rather than serving others. The natural tendency is to seek to impose or enforce by dint of natural power and strength. Christian men are to be strong and they are to be good fighters but not with violent, domineering hands, but prayerful, peaceful hands. "lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling". Taking the lead in prayer in both the family of God and their own families is where the battle is to be joined.

Faced with conflicts in life at home, in the church, at business, in relationships, for the gospel – our first duty is to pray! It is the hardest thing to do, not least because it a battle, a spiritual war. It humbles us, it reminds us of our utter dependence as men upon God alone. But mighty works of God take place when his warriors pray—just remember Elijah, "a man with a nature like ours" (James 5:17).

### **2. Holiness**

*"As for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith."* 1 Timothy 6:11-12

Again the context is important. It is about the relationship and choice between “godliness” and “gain”. Corrupt teachers saw “godliness” as a means to financial, material “gain”. Such teachers and teaching is never far away from the church as are seen today in the so called “health, wealth and happiness gospel”. Such teaching is a far cry from the “son of God who had nowhere to lay his head.”

Godliness is not to be used as a means to financial gain since “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils” (1 Timothy 6 v 10). Rather, the man of God is called to fight a two-stage strategy—to simultaneously flee and pursue, to shun and embrace, to take off our filthy rags and put on Christ’s righteousness.

Flee, shun, put off, run away from materialism, from sin, from all manner of evil. Don’t give it a home, don’t nurture it, don’t offer it a foothold. Be ruthless. “You cannot serve God and Money” warned Jesus. It is a practical impossibility according to him. Run for all your worth from these things.

Conversely pursue, embrace, put on, run towards godliness, that is, the kingdom of God, the priorities of the King, the values of the age to come. It’s a fight, it’s a battle that has to be consciously engaged in every day. It is tough to go against the flow, to maintain standards, to fight the world, the flesh and the devil. But it is what it means to be a Christian warrior, a man of God.

### **3. The Scriptures**

*“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work”*

#### **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

It is by the Scriptures that the man of God is taught and by it he rebukes the world. This is a fight. We naturally prefer peace and quiet rather than contending for the faith, but this is part of the “good fight”. It is not for the fainthearted. We live in days of

“political correctness” when the Word of God is unacceptable. The man of God stands and fights by proclaiming the truth of God’s Word in all kinds of situations.

The war is faced when you refuse to compromise Christian standards at work; it is faced when family deride your choice of Christian service before career; it is faced when you insist that hearing the Scriptures is more important than playing sport on Sunday. It is faced every day in every way. But it is the only life worth living!

The man of God is called to fight by prayer, by holiness of life and the Word of God; to follow the Captain of the Lord’s Hosts, who himself won the battle by a sacrificial bravery that took him to the cross and who calls upon his disciples to follow him.

## **DISCUSS**

- Q1.** What are the biggest challenges facing Christian men seeking to live godly lives in our culture and churches today?
- Q2.** What might you and a friend (or small group of men) put in place to stimulate and encourage one another to be “Christian Warriors” in prayer, holiness and Scripture?
- Q3.** “No discipline – no discipleship” True or not? How does spiritual discipline differ from legalism, and what might it involve week by week in your life?

## BIBLE STUDY

### 1 Timothy 4: 6-16

In this chapter Paul is stressing to Timothy the importance of making spiritual tasks the highest priority of life.

- Q1.** What does it mean in practice to “train yourself for godliness” (v7)?
- Q2.** Unpack the five aspects of godliness in v12. Think about their scope and apply to your life.
- Q3.** According to v15 –16, what things exactly are men to be seriously intent about in living the Christian life?
- Q4.** What practical changes and action will you take in response to the calling of this passage?

# 3 PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Men and God

*John Benton*

**W**e are brought into a relationship with the living God by the gospel. And we grow in that relationship as we spend time listening to him and talking with him...

We are going to briefly explore the question of how our personal devotions can help us to become the men that God would have us be. I make three assumptions.

My first assumption is that **we can only have living contact with God through personal faith in Christ**. Our wrongdoings exclude us from God’s presence, and Christ’s death alone cleanses the sin of all those who believe and makes us welcome and acceptable to God, **Hebrews 10:19**.

The second assumption is that to develop a workable and profitable devotional life will be work. There are many reasons for this:

★ **SOCIAL:** seeking God is alien to the fundamentally secular culture in which we live. The pressures of modern life tend