

# The Masculine Church

“...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,  
to mature manhood.” ~ EPHESIANS 4:13

## IF THE CHURCH IS A BRIDE, IN WHAT SENSE CAN IT BE MASCULINE?

The feminine nature of the church spoken of in Scripture is not original to the New Testament. God had already pictured Israel as his bride and his Son as the bridegroom. She was the would-be harlot taken from the commons and brought into the palace, only to play the whore again and again. Our problem here does not regard the redemptive aspects of that story. The Christian who is a male struggles with a more secret problem, one which, I suspect, not too many ladies in the church have ever considered. The very nature of worship demands that, when all is said and done, all Christians are in, for lack of a better phrase, a “feminine” relationship to God. Hence, just at the moment when biblical theology would solve the modern dilemmas of manhood, it then presents its sons with another identity crisis! But the Scriptures are not silent on how to balance out the *collective feminine* of the whole church with the *individual masculine* of the member. We must first of all remember that marriage and gender on earth are merely shadows of a higher reality. I am not saying that gender will be annihilated in heaven; there is ample evidence from the Bible that it will not—Thank God! However, earthly marriage *will* be. And what replaces it is like the perfect circle compared to the child’s first attempt to scribble. This at least allows us to picture this “collective feminine” of the whole church as so inconceivable that we are at liberty not to have it trip us up. The marriage of Christ to the church surely does not include any of the hideous conceptions that no doubt cause men to stumble. But none of this concerns us here. We are asking the more immediate question: How does a Christian man understand masculinity to be an essentially **ecclesiological** (churchy) thing at all? How does a member of the church act manly in just this arena? In what sense is this church activity the very essence of masculinity? At least I wish the questions would be asked in this way—these would finally be closer to the right kind of questions.

## IF YOU’RE A MODERN MAN, YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT ‘CHURCH’ IS!

Here is our first problem: I can count the men I personally know who understand what “the church” is on one hand. This will of course offend everyone that doesn’t fit on that hand; but I assure you, my purpose is not to offend. Anyone who knows what the church *is* would not ask a question such as the one we are considering. The answer would be a straight deduction from the nature of the church as a kingdom that was

inaugurated in the first coming of Christ, and is to expand until its consummation at His second coming. More often than not, a basic knowledge of this two-stage kingdom invasion still fails to resonate with men—They somehow or other either do not hear the word “invasion,” or, if they do, think it some hokey rah-rah talk from a little-girls club to sell a product. And yet, the failure of these men to follow up at least once with a question like, “*Invasion*—what do you mean?” is just one more symptom of our emasculation. We are pacified enough by the alternative toy masculinities; like the Romans who were handed their bread and circuses while their real freedoms were being taken from them; like a mindless cat who is magnetically driven around by a ball of yarn at the amusement of its owner.

### THE PHYSICAL IS A TYPE AND SHADOW OF ESSENTIAL MASCULINITY

All of the various trappings of manhood in this world—from the backyard to the high school gym to the battlefield or the boardroom—are merely the shadows of what God made the man for. It is not that these things “do not matter,” but rather, that they matter as a stage does to an actor and to a script. They are not the script itself. But, one may ask, do they *define* the actor? And I suppose that would all depend on what we mean by “define.” It is a bit like how Paul uses the word *justify* [Rom. 3:28] as opposed to the way that James uses the word [Jam. 2:24]. The one refers to the basis for action; the other, to the act of proving it out. Likewise, the stage is the only place that people can see the story unfold; but the mature connoisseur of drama will understand by sheer instinct that all of the pomp and circumstance of the stage does not amount to the story itself. The onlooker who mistakes the props for the moral will have become a prop himself—he will have failed to engage with the mind of the playwright, and so, he will not have acted. He will have been less of a man.

Actually, the only thing that gives meaning to these “stages” of male action is to remember that *stages* here is in the plural—they are merely the particulars for which the kingdom of Christ is the universal. If we remember Job’s friends, we might remember that in the midst of their often accurate theology, they mistook the stages for the Stage, and presumed upon the Playwright. They assumed that Job’s misfortunes were a sure sign of his unfaithfulness; we might say, even his fraudulence. Now if the kingdom advancing through the King’s men is what masculinity is all about, then we can begin to see the Stage descending like New Jerusalem upon to fit its earthly copies. The Kingdom brings unity to the diversity of kingdoms; the Man brings unity to the diversity of men. Have I been reading too much Plato? I think not.

Sometimes the Bible even presents the physical stage of masculinity in order to give shadows of the spiritual. For example, when David’s mighty men sought to beat back the forces positioned against Israel—having to divide their forces, Joab said to Abishai: “If the Arameans are too strong for me, then you shall help me, but if the sons of Ammon are too strong for you, then I will come to help you. Be strong, and let us ‘play

the man' (KJV) for our people and for the cities of our God; and may the Lord do what is good in His sight" [2 Sam. 10:11-12]. Here we can see a very manly embracing of what the old Westminster divines used to call *primary and secondary causation*—but I won't torture you with neck-deep theology. What it amounts to is this: Joab knew that God was going to do on that battlefield what God was going to do. It was the same thing God is always doing on all other fields, namely, all his holy will! On the other hand, Joab was obviously not talking fatalism. He communicates two things: 1) "God will determine exactly what is about to happen," and 2) "Let's go kick some Aramean and Ammonite butt!" How could he say both? Answering that question with confidence will be a key to becoming a real man of the kingdom.

## HOW A MAN WAS MEANT TO LEAD—IN THE CHURCH

In his book, *Future Men*, Doug Wilson says that men are basically five things. In his words, they are: lords, husbandmen, saviors, sages, and glory-bearers. These are five different aspects to the essence of masculinity. And I will have to be honest: I never got out of the second chapter, but in that brief introduction to the book, I was already captivated by this way of shaping the discussion. Let me briefly summarize each of these five things and then argue (I don't know if Wilson would think of it this way or not)—but I will argue that this fifth aspect to Man, as "glory-reflector," functions as the sun in our solar system of biblical masculinity. It functions as the center of gravity and light for the other four.

### *The Five Aspects of Masculinity*

1. **Lords** – In the first place, man was given dominion over the Garden. And we will see very quickly in the Genesis account why it is that man tends to scale the forest, while the woman nurtures its individual parts. We will see why men tend to synthesize and think in systems, instead of bits and pieces. And it is here where we will also see the basis for what is nowadays called the "Cultural Mandate" that God has given to man—to subdue the earth and everything in it. But since "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it" [Ps. 24:1], the man must remember that his earthly lordship is only as good as his being God's ambassador. Nevertheless, the desire for dominion cannot be rooted out, even if we try. This is why even the smallest boys spend their summer days trying to conquer things in their backyard. Their dominion-need is ingrained. And central to being a "lord of the earth" is *vision*. The loftier that vision, the more the man thinks as he was made to think.

2. **Husbandmen** – Now this old word refers to farming. But a quick look at Genesis 2 will tell why it is relevant: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (v. 15). Most immediately, this tells us that work is ordained by God. Work is not a product of the fall. True, fallen work is drudgery and disappointment. But the essence of work is as glorious as the essence of man. It copies

God in His creativity. It consolidates the diverse things of His creation and casts it like a crown at His feet. The cultural mandate of the man begins and ends in cultivation. The word “culture” comes from the Latin, *cultus*, which was a farming word concerning the keeping of the ground. It was Chesterton who said that “culture comes from the cult.” That is, the keeping of the whole of the earth, to ensure that it doesn’t return to the wild, takes the triumph of the right ideas. It was Adam who gave science to the world in his naming of the animals. And in this way, man transforms the conquered forest into a flourishing garden.

3. **Saviors** – This word may cause trouble at first, but anyone who has been around any boy lately will know what we mean. All healthy boys grow up with an attraction to adventure, a taste for the fight—not to boast or to flaunt their abilities, but to save and to rescue and to set the world to rights. We know that Jesus is the only (Capital “S”) Savior, and as Genesis 3 tells us, it is He who will slay the dragon, ultimately. However, we boys becoming men are given our own armor and our own swords—as *The Chronicles of Narnia* so wonderfully portray. We have been called to take part in a great counter-Rebellion against the great rebel—the dragon—and all his minions. There is a drama of all drama, and a battle of all battles, for which all other dramas and battles has been merely a simulation and a boot-camp. Hence, strength and sacrifice and courage are all to be built in and celebrated and directed to the great battle—The Last Battle.

4. **Sages** – We might be tempted to think that study and thoughtfulness are not as masculine as those things just mentioned. But we might be reminded of that scene in *Braveheart* where the young William Wallace asked his uncle to train him with the sword, to which the uncle replied: “You will learn to use this, after you learn to use *this*” (poking on the top of his head). It was Shakespeare who said that “the pen is mightier than the sword,” and it might not seem like it when a man with a sword confronts a man with a pen. But we should remember that the man with the sword has only received his orders from kings or majorities who have received *their* orders from the ideas of intellectuals. Better to conquer both—starting with the pen—in order to conquer all. We are commanded in Scripture to “gird up the loins of (the) mind” [1 Pet. 1:13]. And this teaches us that the ground-war will only be as effective as the air-war has been. It takes a good bombing from above to clear the best paths into the enemy’s fortress. Boys must learn the manliness of intellectual rigor, and the discipline of the great books.

So, Lords, Husbandmen, Saviors, and Sages—All planets of mannishness revolving around one blazing center:

5. **Glory-bearers** – Now what does that first biblical mention of man say about his design? Anything? I think it does. In Genesis 1:26, the Lord—speaking as He is among the Persons of the Trinity—says this: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” and then Moses adds, one verse down: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (v. 27). We have to see

that while “image” is a noun, no one can see it if it not also a verb! As Piper says, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” If I merely get God right in propositions but do not love what I see, then I lie about God in that speech. If I act in service to God, but it not a service that receives enjoyment from Him, then I rob glory by presuming to contribute to God. If I feel deep levels of emotion concerning religious things, but I don’t care to chart out the contours of who God really is, then I am a god to myself (and very excited about it). But the point is that the *whole soul* must enjoy all that God is in order for us image-bearers to be telling His story. The whole meaning of maturity—from boys to men—is the process of “growing into glory.” That is what makes a man a man.

### THE MASCULINE PROPHET, PRIEST, & KING

What is the essence of masculinity? The believer knows the answer to this if he just remembers his basic Christian doctrine: Jesus Christ is the essential Man. As the God-man, Jesus is the only possible Mediator between God and man [cf. 1 Tim. 2:5]. He restores the image that was shattered in Adam. One of the great contributions of John Calvin to historic theology was the three offices of Christ, that He is prophet, priest, and king to the people of God.

1. **Prophet** – Every man is called to be a prophet. Adam failed to feed his wife, and so the apple did the trick. The serpent’s lie was only as seductive because of the ache in the belly already present. What is needed to feed is the bread from heaven. The word of God is often pictured in Scripture as bread, or, at least food for the soul: “Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” [Mat. 4:4]. The Christian man must be the prophet of his home in that he has no leadership but the theological vision of all things that defines everything from his vocation to his romance to his disciplining of the children. If there is no theological vision of all things, then there is no bread. It is true that physical bread was used by Jesus to meet the crowds where they were—they were hungry. But He didn’t leave them where they were. He always used the lower to point to the higher. It remains true that the man who does not provide for his family’s material needs is “worse than an unbeliever” [1 Tim. 5:8]; but the reason why physical provision matters is so that the whole souls of those in this little church can be tended.

2. **Priest** – Every man is called to be a priest. Adam failed to lead his wife, and so the serpent became her guide. The serpent’s persona was only dazzling because of a lack of attention already present. What is needed to lead is the highest message from the lowliest servant. In the biblical model of manliness, there is an account of authority and respect. Its credit is credibility, and it accrues to the degree that the man stays on his knees and dies to himself. This is not comforting to men—we want to beat our chest and seize opportunities and stand on our own two feet. We know that Jesus said this about greatness and leadership in general. He said that “whoever would be great among you

must be your servant” [Mk. 10:43], and that “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” [Jn. 10:24]. We remember Jesus saying things like this all the time. But we are a little hesitant to make it the standard of male leadership. Yet Paul commands husbands to “love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” [Eph. 5:25]. Wives are called to submit to husbands to the point of a decision; husbands are called to submit to wives to the point of death. Jesus braved any and every indignity “for the joy that was set before Him” [Heb. 12:2], and as a result of His testing, He is now our Priest forever—leading His brothers and sisters into the presence of the Father.

3. **King** – Every man is called to be a king. Adam failed to defend the borders of the Garden, and so the serpent played the court’s advisor to Eden’s queen. The serpent’s power was only as potent because of the spinelessness that was already present. It was Edmund Burke who said that “All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing,” and the Irish poet, Yeats, more than a century later added, “The best lack all conviction, while the worst are filled with passionate intensity.” Isn’t that the truth! You know that it is very easy to be bad, and not at all easy to stand up and take your stance against it. But we are not making excuses for Adam here. We are only pointing out that his dominion of the Garden was also a political one in which he was obligated to call to arms all of the resources at his disposal. Men of homes and churches are sworn to an unwritten oath—to repel all enemies, foreign and domestic, or, to use Paul’s words about the wolves, that “They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families” [Titus 1:11]. Jesus Christ is the ultimate King. His Jerusalem is the standard for all our Camelots. He alone can put an end to injustice, invincibly defend the weak, and uphold the glory of His realm. Still, He calls us to join in His army, here and now. He tells us to take up the weapons of warfare in Ephesians 6 and 2 Corinthians 10. And he tells us that through the church, the coming of His kingdom is announced to all—no apologies.

### THE ENEMIES OF KINGDOM MASCULINITY

Any man who is a man already wants to be these three things. They just didn’t know that Jesus is the standard. Jesus is the ultimate Man. And because we do not preach Him in this way, no man can fall down and worship Him—and as Driscoll says, “You can’t worship someone that you can beat up!” Sadly, the Jesus that is preached is as effeminate as our churches. But the exalted Christ of Scripture is returning with fire blazing from His eyes, a sword emerging from His mouth, and a tattoo on His thigh that says King of kings, Lord of lords—and that is a Jesus that will bring men back into church. Likewise, He has a mission that will inspire real men. We just aren’t allowed to believe in it. And why is that? How has our masculinity been robbed of us? How has the old world of kings and castles and dragons and swords and armor and chivalry and legends and glory—how has the wool been pulled over our eyes from seeing that world? Well that brings us to the enemies of the Christian man:

*From the Battlefield to the Conveyor Belt*

When we talk about the sins that are “male sins” or sins that take the man off of the battlefield, we have to notice that there *are those* sins and then there is also a progression, a slippery slope, from those sins to a vicious cycle that effectively removes the man from real, manly life forever. First, we will treat the basic male temptations that get one on the vicious cycle (or conveyor belt). Notice that in all of these, something made right in Genesis 1 was perverted by Genesis 3. The glory-rushing, forest-scaling, sword-wielding strength of the man remains in the soul, but now it faces away from the Garden and is shattered by sin. These main immediate sins are arrogance, anger, lust, and materialism.

1. **Arrogance** – If Augustine and Lewis were right that the primal sin was Pride, then, in the man, this attempt to lift ourselves above God shows itself in ways that pervert his original design. Pride is nothing more than *contending with God for His glory*. To a young lady, arrogance in man can look the same, on the outside, as confidence. But you will notice that an arrogant person is always doing to other people what a truly confident person would never need to do. He controls, belittles, and boasts to them. Interesting. It would seem that he needs others to an unhealthy degree—I mean their approval, or affirmation. And an arrogant man is unreachable because he is unteachable. He already knows everything. He has cut himself off from genuine maturity and friendships. And this is of utmost importance for girls to learn as they grow up. How does a girl tell the difference between arrogance and healthy confidence in a man? The answer is simple—One is a reflection of self-sufficiency, while the other is a reflection of God-sufficiency. A young man who has God as his treasure has something infallible to commend to a mate, and thus he can truly lead, provide for, and protect her. Arrogance stunts this ability in a man. And she can only assess this over time in a church context. But the important point for the man here is that arrogance and worship are incompatible. You must choose here—humility or a hardened heart. And the hardened heart gets harder and harder, by nature.

2. **Anger** – Now what about anger? It would be fair to say that anger issues forth from an arrogance that goes unfulfilled. If I get the idea that there is a certain amount of control that is due me, then I will become more impatient as reality does not bend to me. That may sound silly, but that is what men do. Men have that innate desire to tend the Garden, or scale the forest, and we are read our sentence in Genesis 3 that “cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you” (v. 18). Now if someone is a “passive-aggressive” type, rather than a “Type-A” male, then the stuff of anger may become depression. It’s the same thorns and thistles, really, only bottled up inside. Staying depressed or acting out in anger can take us out of society, much less the church. We know that to be true. And as with all of these “surface level” sins, we will see that they lead to the deeper bondage of our present suburban captivity.

3. **Lust** – Now lust doesn't need much of an introduction, I suppose. The church is well at work trying to slay this dragon. Typically we have ignored Jude's advice to those who would have mercy on those caught in sin to "show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh" (v. 23). And, as I have said elsewhere, we may not have succeeded in doing anything other than replacing one sin with another. In the name of attacking a sin that takes young men off of the battlefield for a season (lust), we have subjected them the sins of materialism and legalism in our uncounseled young brides. And marriages built on such flimsy foundations will continue to take more men out of the church. To fight lust, we must be up front with men—in the appropriate context, of course. Likewise, older women must be more intentional in advising younger ladies on appropriate dress at church—starting with the truth that the saints are gathered to see more of God, not more of them! Men need to be as brutal with their flesh as Paul was with his—Die daily! Mortify the flesh! Take yourself out of all compromising situations. Rip the television out of the house. Only go on the internet supervised. Do whatever it takes! And don't wait another second.

4. **Materialism** – You may not like this sin to be ranked with the other three, since we are all good capitalists and loyal customers and obedient Republicans. Now I have no patience for any form or level of socialism, but while the free market way of life is the most effective buffer between the individual and the state, it is not a spiritual virtue! The "suburban captivity of the church," and all of its trappings, allures us with an ethic that is diametrically opposed to Jesus' call to radical discipleship. Please understand that Jesus' did not merely call a special class of saints to be disciples, but in fact, all Christians are called to drop all to follow Christ! If you are not a disciple, you are not a Christian. If Jesus is not your only final and central treasure, you are not saved. This is the way Jesus talks. Don't be talked out of it for a second by "Americianity." Jesus says about money: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" [Mat. 6:24]. Now the church needs all sorts of types from all sorts of income brackets. This honors God. But what the kingdom does not need is to be held captive by money—either by defining spiritual maturity in a man as the size of the wallet or by allowing the bribery of who can give (or wants to give) determine vision and direction. Winston Churchill said, "The destiny of man is not measured by material computations." If this is true out in the rest of society, much more is it true in the church.

And all four of these surface sins, if we allow them to control us and determine the course of our young lives will guarantee that we will be absent from the kingdom as our lives progress. Slip up here, and you will find out the hard way what I mean. Proverbs 25:28 says that "a man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls." Get this self-control now, young men, before it is too late. As we move our way down this vicious cycle—this conveyor belt—we now come to see where most men are held captive, like the frozen figures at the outer rung of Dante's Inferno, these brothers



of ours in bondage have their eyes wide shut and their mouths opened to silence like a bad dream with no end.