

The Role of Godly Masculinity in the Body of Christ

By Jay Wegter

Does your Godly masculinity matter in the church? Or, to put it bluntly, are you a seat-warming neuter whose masculinity is really of little significance to the body of Christ?

In other words, as far as church attendance goes, does it really matter if you are male or female? If it does, how does it matter? Are you able to spell it out? Can you enunciate the distinction between masculine and feminine ministry? In this author's thinking, the above begs the question: Why is every man in the church essential, even indispensable? Why are we as men vital to the church and its spiritual health? Perhaps the men are there simply to pull the church's machinery—satisfying the basic needs of the institution in making sure there are enough nickels and noses? Or, is there something far more important? Another way to ask the question, 'What is the value of your presence as a man? Does it go far beyond the command to not forsake assembling together? (Heb 10:25).

So how is your spiritual calling to minister different than that of a woman? What are you called to do in the name of the Christian religion that is different than that of a female?

Why does the true strength of the church turn upon the faithfulness of the men to their unique and indispensable calling? Can you explain why the church and its strength revolves around men being faithful to their calling? First, a little bit of a backdrop for why I'm giving this lesson: decades of cultural and evangelical feminism have had the effect of 'neutering' the church by making the exercise of male and female spirituality nearly indistinguishable, or equivalent for that matter. The writer of Hebrews had the men in mind when he chides his readers, stating that they should have been teachers by now but instead have become dull of hearing (Heb 5:11-12). These church members had become like the Dead Sea; there was no outflow; they only took in. They only receive, like consumers who are 'end users'. They have not made it their aim to mature to the point of being able to actively spiritually influence others and teach them.

We don't lay all of the blame for this inactivity at the feet of feminism; for it is all too common for men to have abdicated their spiritual role and calling (note: the fall and distortion of gender roles). But it is true that feminism has in some ways implied that a Christian woman is an ideal believer because she has none of the elements of toxic masculinity, or patriarchal privilege, or potential abuse of power that males possess. And, so this sort of paints men in a corner by suggesting that their masculinity might not be as spiritual as the woman's spirituality. Thus, in regard to the question, 'What is the difference between male and female ministry?' I think of a recent street poll conducted around America. People were asked the question, 'What is a woman?' Folks could not even define a woman. They were afraid that they would make her look substantially different than a man, weaker, or more

dependent, or more emotional than a man; their answer would be labeled discriminatory. As if by suggesting something that would deny her equivalency to a man it would be politically incorrect (equivalency and equality have been intentionally construed with one another; this is a massive error in feminism—the idea that gender equality will be reached by sameness).

Men are called by God to be spiritual influencers in ways that are more manly and stronger than the ways in which women are called to spiritually influence. John Piper notes that Christ's discourses have a very strong, masculine, tough feel to them. In many ways this is an indicator of how men are to have a particular ministry that is different than women. Women have a very vital potential in ministry, but much of it, in terms of their work, is in a support role (1 Cor 11:7; 1 Tim 2:15). Now, the work they do with their children and with one another is very direct. That may not be a support role but a very direct role, but, in terms of the men's ministry, they are in a support role. So what about this issue of men called to be spiritual influencers? This spiritual influence is not simply making occasional Biblical comments, but it is very much tied to admonishment, to exhortation, to encouragement, to consistent doctrinal purity. In fact, we see how normal it is that the church is to be engaged in mutual admonishment. This is normative for a healthy church. We see this in Roman 15:14. But, what would have to happen for men to embrace admonishment as normal? The exhortation and imploring of one another to love and good deeds and obedience (1 Thess 2:11-12). By way of illustration, permit this humorous story: I returned from speaking at a men's retreat and my wife had gone to a women's retreat that same weekend. So I asked her, "Honey, what did you do at the women's retreat?" "Well, we laughed together, we cried together, we read the Bible together, and we had tea together. What did you do at your retreat?" I said, "We threw tomahawks at a target and then we talked about what hills we were going to die on. We were calling each other to be men of principle." The contrast presents us with an interesting study. Regarding the man's role as spiritual influencer, I'm going to use a term from one of the writers of the men's movement. This is the title of his book: Fire in the Belly (FITB).

'Fire in the belly' refers to the fact that when God's truth is churning inside of you, you will frequently meet people and situations in which you must speak and will speak. God's Word is transformational, it must be spoken. It must be let out and applied. It must be addressed to an area of abuse or compromise or discouragement, or falsehood. And if that FITB is not expressed in a care for the body of Christ in the honor of God, that FITB can turn into pus in the gut. It can just fester and just sit there and become an abscess, like a bacterial infection. So, in thinking about this fire in the belly, men are called to be spiritual influencers, they are called to do the heavy lifting of ministry. The heavy lifting of ministry means that men will have to be the heavy at times. Calling out those who are in disobedience.

Men are called first of all to be spiritual influencers in the home. According to God's Word, they should be first of all teaching their family—leading their family spiritually. In fact, this is

one of the qualifications for an elder. It is that he is a spiritual leader in his home. How can he be entrusted with leading the church if he's not a spiritual leader in his own household (1 Tim 3:4-5)? Men are called to be spiritual leaders in the home, in the body of Christ, and in the community at large through their outreach. And we refer to these three concentric circles as the principle of the enlarged sphere of influence. In other words, as men are faithful in the most inner sphere in their walk with Christ, and in their home, then that is part of the qualification for them to be spiritual influencers in the body of Christ. And as they are faithful in the body of Christ, they are going to want to do outreach in their community and do the work of the great commission in evangelism and disciple-making. So in the principle of the enlarged sphere (of influence), faithfulness in inner circles equips you for greater faithfulness in these enlarged spheres of influence. So the spiritual influencer is not simply dropping comments here and there. He has a FITB principle operating in him. And, we are going to look at several examples from a number of different men in scripture.

The way Elihu spoke to Job and Job's three friends is a beautiful picture of FITB (Job 32:19-20). Notice that Elihu is about to explode—but not due to ego, or in search of attention or favor or personal power. It is God's truth in him, his zeal that God may be rightly represented that drives him to speak. So we must take note, FITB is not just wanting to spout off—no it has specific purpose—to represent God accurately when His character and the knowledge of Him is being distorted.

Phinehas ran a spear through an Israelite and a Moabite woman who were involved in an act of illicit sexual contact that was joined to idolatry. And these Moabite women were counseled by Balaam in terms of how they could bring Israel into ruin by idolatry if they seduced the men. So God tells Phinehas that he has demonstrated a zeal for God's honor and God's name that is like God's own zeal, and therefore, his descendants will be established throughout all generations because of your faithfulness (**Num 25:11**). When we think of David slaying Goliath with a mere sling and a stone, we tend to think of youthful exuberance (even blind zeal), but not enough upon David's FITB speech that came first (**1 Sam 17:26, 45-47**). Jeremiah has a difficult calling. He is to command the inhabitants of Judah to surrender to Babylon. He is telling them what they do not want to hear, that they need to repent, abandon their idolatry, surrender to Babylon and basically *take their medicine* as God disciplines them with 70 years of exile.

Jeremiah communicates his tension as God's prophet. If I speak the truth, they threaten to kill me. If I don't speak, then there is fire in my bones. I can't contain it (**Jer 20:7-9, 10-13**). This is the FITB principle. **Ezekiel is fed an edible scroll, like a round, cylindrical piece of baklava (Ezek 3:1-3, 4-11, 3:14, 16-21).** This is the layered phyllo dough with honey, and butter, and crushed walnuts between each layer. It's a very delicious dessert. It looks a lot like a scroll, or like pages of a book. He is fed the scroll. It was sweet in his mouth, but it became bitter in his

stomach, and then he was able to prophesy divine warning, threat, call to repentance, and finally, judgment. The Word infused into the depths of his being had a marked result. He was enraged in the bitterness of his spirit, and this pictures a man so indwelt with the Word of God that, when he speaks, he is speaking for God. He is speaking the very words of God, and they certainly will come to pass. They are designed to produce repentance. Or, in the case of Ezekiel and Jeremiah's ministry, much of their ministries involved judicial hardening. The divine prophecies they uttered did not produce repentance but hardened the people who heard them making them stiff and flint-like for judgment, that they might be finally broken. The effects of the contents of the word of God in Ezekiel completely conditioning his ministry (**Ezek 3:1-3, 4-11, 3:14, 16-21**).

The apostle John, in the book of Revelation, also eats a scroll. He was commanded to eat it. He takes the scroll, and this was his preparation to again preach terrifying prophecies of judgment (Rev 10:7-11). In some of these cases, as with John, the scroll was sweet to the taste but became bitter in the stomach. This paradox of sweetness and bitterness is a picture of the fact that the saints understand that God's grace, the gospel, the work of Christ, the love of their savior is sweet beyond words, and yet there is a great and awful judgment to come for the impenitent. The world is going to be judged. It's just inconceivable that it says in the book of Revelation that 1/3 of the inhabitants of planet earth will be slain or will perish during the seven-year tribulation. This paradox of sweetness and bitterness is summarized in **Isaiah 24**.

The post-exilic leaders of Israel during the repatriation would be Ezra and Nehemiah during the period of rebuilding the temple and rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. Both Ezra and Nehemiah truly exemplified fire in the belly in their ministries. Ezra 9-10. And in their ministries, we see there are certain steps in bringing a people to repentance. Ezra is appalled at the disobedience of these Israelites in marrying foreign women so that Jewish families' children are taking on their foreign language and idolatry. First of all, there is the step of being appalled, and then there is prayer and contrition (confession of sin). There is mourning over the disobedience and apostasy, and then there's action. These idolatrous wives have to be put away. Consider what an agonizing thing that must have been that families had to be broken up in order for the nation to be true to the Word of God. 70 years of exile in Babylon, the city designated by God as the mother of harlots (**Rev 17:5**) (the center where idolatrous religions originated). Idolatry morning, noon, and night was the 'cure' of Judah's national idolatry. 70 years of captivity was very essential in preparing Israel for the Messiah. And after exile she never again embraced national idolatry again, even though it would be 500 more years before the first coming of Christ—that was so important to Messiah's birth and ministry.

Nehemiah speaks of something very similar to Ezra's charge in Nehemiah 9 and 10 and 13. In Nehemiah 10:28-31, 13:23-31. Nehemiah curses these people who had entered mixed marriages. He pulls their hair. He rebukes them. He is right in their face. And we would ask the

question: Why is Nehemiah's reaction so severe and violent? And we might say something like this: No longer imitated the nations in filling the land with idols. So Nehemiah really cuts off any possibility of idolatry at the pass by saying: You're going to put away these foreign wives. You're not going to have these foreign wives bring their idols and their heathen language into the homes of the Israelites. During Israel's restoration, God really used Nehemiah here as the insurance that Israel would not return to national idolatry.

So when we think about *Fire In The Belly*, it does not develop automatically. To have FITB and exercise your Godly masculinity depends on a number of things:

- **You need to develop first-hand convictions.** You can't just merely sit under an orthodox pulpit—under one as dynamic as Pastor Matt's, and say "Well, I'm fine because I sit under the words of a very articulate teacher." No, you need first-hand convictions. You need to develop first-hand convictions through diligent study. It's very important. Those who ate the scroll had their whole being filled with truth. They had first-hand convictions. They took in the word of God and they meditated upon it. You're going to need first-hand convictions if you are going to be discipled effectively and disciple others. This is because our convictions and our walk often need to be rejoined. They need to become congruent. Faith and life must operate in tandem. What you believe and what you practice must resemble each other very closely. One of the purposes for discipleship is to resolve the contradiction between what you say you believe and how you actually live. This is only possible if you are committed to developing first-hand convictions. We hold beliefs, but convictions hold us. You must have controlling convictions. You must have convictions so strong that they control you. We might defend a belief, but we will die for a conviction. Very different.
- **Remember discipleship centers on learning obedience, teaching believers to observe all that Christ has commanded.** This means that if you are going to enter discipleship relationships you've got to welcome accountability; you've got to give another brother access to your life. You have to have a close enough buddy-ship with your friend that you're able to imitate in that person's life what is worthy of being imitated. This is how faith is to be passed on. We imitate the faith of others. This is very clear in so many Scripture passages (**Heb 6:11-12**).
- **So how can I go from just merely opening my mouth out of duty—all the way to FITB?** FITB is zeal according to knowledge it's not just an eccentric zeal, but zeal according to knowledge (**Rom 10:2**). FITB is very much related to maintaining a clear conscience. The apostle Paul said he does his best to maintain a clear conscience before God and men (**Acts 24:14-16**). When the apostle Paul stood before Festus and Agrippa, they were in royal robes (**Acts 24-26**). They had pomp and circumstance and human authority, and

here's Paul, a dirty, scruffy, a scar covered prisoner in chains, and yet he had FITB. He used that opportunity to preach the gospel to those who were interrogating him.

- **FITB is very much related to hating what God hates and loving what God loves.** FITB is a function of fearing God as opposed to fearing men. If we fear men and live for the praise of men, we will not risk speaking the truth. Jesus said in **John 5:44** how can you possibly believe if you are living for the approval and glory of man for those two things are contradictory--mutually exclusive. You can't live for the approval of man and the approval of God at the same time. To have FITB is to have is to have God's glory and honor as your chief controlling cause. God's glory becomes your highest cause and that's very much tied to FITB.
- **Also FITB is developed by meditating on Scripture: Ps 1:2; Ps 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97; 145:5.** Why is Scripture meditation so important? Just brushing up against the Word of God is not enough—just having the words pass in front of your eyes. You actually have to speak and apply to yourself what you know about the works and ways and wonders and will of God. Speaking these things to yourself frequently—feeding one's soul on its truths—arguing yourself back into full surrendered faith, arguing yourself out of doubt, arguing yourself out of discontentment to overflowing gratitude. Coming to the Word to meet the Lord within the pages of His book. In fact, meditation involves preaching to yourself the Scriptures. First of all we ought to be asking the question: do I have a casual relationship to this book, or is my attitude: I must know what's in it in order to obey it and to know my God and Savior. *EXAMPLE: What has to happen for a sizzling new York steak to actually become part of your biceps? You must chew it. It must be digested, mixed with enzymes, and HCL which finally break it down into amino acids. Finally that steak is broken down into the molecular level. It is assimilated through the semi-permeable membrane of the small intestine and then it is actually suspended in the blood stream as amino acids and then your cells pick that up and rebuild muscle tissue. Think of the steps the steak has to go through until it can actually become a part of your own body and that's similar to Scripture meditation.* It's been said that when God distinguished the clean from the unclean animals, the clean animals chewed the cud and the unclean animals did not. This led the Puritans to say a true believe chews truth; unbelievers do not chew truth. That is a direct parallel here for meditation on Scripture.
- **Are these Old Testament speakers who had FITB, are they unique, are they an exception or is this normative for every believing man?** The person who has FITB is a man of principle. He exercises self-control. He's committed to integrity. He wants an untarnished testimony before God and men. He's not controlled by the impulses and passions of his lower nature. He exercises self-control for the sake of others. As a result of that, God honors him and gives him an expanding place of spiritual influence. Here's a

man who has moral authority. He can speak to issues related to purity and obedience because his life is committed to those things. Because of this he has every reason to be bold. In fact, Paul says in **Ephesians 6** he wants to be even more bold. He's asking for the Ephesians to pray for his boldness. In fact, he says boldness is the way he ought to speak (**Eph 6:20**). FITB not an exception, and I think a lot of men are going to be surprised at that, that boldness is normative. It's the way we ought to speak. It's not some kind of exception reserved for anointed pastors and missionaries. For those who have FITB For them God is immense and infinite, and people are small. I think for most people it is likely the other way around; God is bit remote and people are large, but if you're going to have FITB God must be immense and people small in terms of whose approval matters most to you. So how much does the glory and approval of others matter to you? Some men are physically imposing; just very dominate athletes, and yet they live for the glory of other men and not for the glory of God—that is why they are physically strong, but spiritually anemic and harmless.

CONCLUSION: Consider how Ezra and Nehemiah are really exemplifying FITB in their ministries. In these post-exilic books of Ezra and Nehemiah, we see the devil's alphabet opposing God's work in restoring Israel. The devil is fighting against the knowledge of God. He's fighting against the worship of God—that is also the world we live in (**2 Cor 10:3-5**). The knowledge of God and the worship of God are going to take place by the rebuilding of the temple in the city of Jerusalem, so there can be religious instruction and worship. The evil one wants to shut that off. He wants to destroy that. So in these two books we literally see a dissertation of the devil's 'alphabet'—his strategy, his armory, his weapons, his arsenal. And what we learn is that what the devil cannot directly destroy by aggression in trying to stop the rebuilders of Jerusalem he will seek to neutralize the work of God by many unholy alliances. He is a master at leveraging these alliances. He is able to feel for the thinnest tentacle of the world wrapped around a person's heart—whether that be greed, sensual lust, financial anxiety, fear, living for the praise of men, coveting, or discontentment—he is able to feel for those tentacles, manipulate them, and exploit them. And so he seeks to neutralize the work of God by seeking to mix the world with it. And so we see in Ezra and Nehemiah that when the devil could not destroy the work of God by aggression and violence, he seeks to destroy by unholy alliances, by mixing with God's people, by contaminating the purity of God's work by bringing the world into it. It's often said that if Satan can't outwardly destroy the church he'll join it, and that's exactly what Ezra and Nehemiah had to fight against.

Dear brothers, God has called you to be *theologizers, spiritual influencers*. That means as those obedient to Christ, you will be developing your ability to fulfill your calling—by learning to communicate *who God is, what He requires, His beauty, desirability, promises, threats, majesty, His redemption in Christ, and His eternal purposes*. And in terms of what is normative for the believing man—each of us ought to be striving to grow into the qualifications of a

deacon and elder listed in **1 Timothy 3**. For these qualifications are not exceptional, but normative of the kind of Christian character and virtue God desires in men (**see 2 Pet 1:3-5**). We are surrounded by men who name the name of Christ, but who have never been challenged along these lines. These professed brothers seem to have gravitated to finite integration points. In other words, for them religion fits into a tidy compartment, and they give the cream of their time, talent and affection to transient things. Where are the men whose lives are clearly dominated by a transcendent cause? The glory and knowledge of God?

Then, there are men who are more serious about this masculine calling. But, they feel light years away from having a single spark of *Fire In The Belly*. Beloved, every genuine Christian man has a furnace, a boiler room in his soul. But, the soldiers that man that facility may be in a deep coma. Unresolved sin puts our internal warriors to sleep. Some of you may have put your internal warriors to sleep by using porn, or by passivity, or spiritual laziness (ignoring spiritual disciplines and duties). Others by the fear of man—living for the praise of man—or by backsliding into spiritual lukewarmness and apathy. My friends, God is willing to heal your backsliding (**Hos 14:1-9**).