

# The Importance of a Masculine Ministry

## The Life and Ministry of John Charles Ryle

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October 29, 2017

### **Hebrews 13:7**

**Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.**

To the Glory of God

Now the verse that Brother Andy just read to you is where the writer of **Hebrews** instructs the people of the Christian Church to “remember”. And we are to remember people who have two characteristics:

1. Those who led you.
2. Those who spoke the Word of God to you.

And then the writer goes on to say that we are to “do” two things with those who led us and who spoke the Word of God to us:

1. Consider the result of their conduct.
2. Imitate their faith.

Now the way this is written in the original Greek tells me that the people we are to “remember” are dead- because the writer doesn’t say that we are to merely consider their conduct, but we are to consider the *result* of their conduct, and you simply cannot do that until the life of that person is over and there is no more conduct to consider. You see, because we are fallen creatures, as long as somebody is alive, they are able to destroy a lifetime of service and faithfulness. But after a person is dead and with the Lord, the result of his entire life can be considered and his faith imitated.

So, the Holy Bible teaches us that we are to have heroes of the Faith who are now dead, men who led the Church and men who preached and taught the Word of God during their lives, and we are told to consider the end result of their conduct, and we are to then imitate or

copy or emulate their faith. In fact, the writer of **Hebrews** thought this was so important that he included in his Epistle his own brief biographical sketch of several of the OT heroes of the faith, which is what we call today the 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter of **Hebrews**.

Now anytime you do something like this, there is a danger. And the danger is *not* that we might get some historical facts wrong or get some dates mixed up, but that we will, even slightly, *replace* inerrant and infallible Scripture with the weak and frail *experiences* of other human beings, and that is always a danger, no matter how important those people may be.

And yet we see that the writer of **Hebrews** tells us right here to risk that danger and to go ahead and remember them. And so, if God is pleased, I will take this Lord's Day, and also next week, to preach a biography of one of the great heroes of the Christian Faith that I pray will be an inspiration to you, and that will encourage you to take great risks in this radical Love of Jesus Christ.

Now, like many of you, I grew up looking at this time of year as a time when I could dress up and go house to house to get lots and lots of candy. As I became a Christian, I discovered that Halloween on October 31<sup>st</sup> was actually "Hallows Eve", and was a religious celebration begun by the Roman system which celebrated the last day that demons and witches could roam through the earth until the saints would arise on "All Saints Day" on November 1.

But, as I began to study Church History and re-discovered the Reformation and the great significance this moment made upon the world, I also discovered that October 31, 1517, was the date when an Augustinian monk, named Martin Luther, nailed 95 theses to the door at the Church at Wittenberg, Germany. And that simple act began a series of events that became known as "The Protestant Reformation", which was the most widespread spiritual renewal in the history of Christianity.

And the Protestant Reformation was really nothing more than a *re-discovery* of the Grace of God and a time of repentance where many in the visible Church turned away from ecclesiastical nonsense and man-made and unbiblical doctrines, and returned to the primacy of the Word of God.

And when the Reformation crossed the Channel and came to the English-speaking world, one of the groups that sprung out of that great

movement were the "Anglicans", who are the forerunners of the "American Episcopalians", which is the group in which I myself was raised.

And so, in my effort to be Biblical, I want to examine and remember the Life and Ministry of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Anglican Bishop, John Charles Ryle. And my hope in dealing with the life and ministry and faith of JC Ryle is to both clarify and commend what I mean by the value of a "Masculine Ministry".

Now as you read and study the 66 Books of the Holy Bible, you come to realize that the one, true, and living God has revealed Himself to us *pervasively* as "King" rather than "Queen", and as "Father" rather than "Mother". The second Person of the Trinity is revealed as the eternal "Son", not "Daughter". And according to **Genesis 5:2**, the Father and the Son created Man and Woman in His Image, and gave them together the name of the Man, *Adam*.

God sovereignly chose that all the priests in Israel under the Old Covenant were men. And after many decades of living under that inferior First Covenant, the Son of God comes into the world as a Man, not a Woman. Jesus chose twelve men to be His Apostles. And as the Holy Spirit moved upon the Apostles to give them the Revelation of the New Covenant, they clearly and repeatedly said that all the Overseers of His Church, the Pastor/Elders, who teach and who have authority (**1 Timothy 2:12**), should all be men, and not women. Then the Holy Spirit moved upon these men to write that, in the home, the "head", who bears special responsibility to lead, protect, and provide, should be the Husband, not the Wife (**Ephesians 5:22-33**).

And from these facts and much more, JC Ryle concluded that God has given Christianity what he called a "masculine feel". And that this was not some "cosmic accident", but that God did this on purpose. And, being a God of love, Ryle said God did this for the maximum flourishing of both men *and women*. So, JC Ryle did not believe that God created women to languish, or to be frustrated, or in any way to suffer or fall short of full and lasting joy, in a decidedly "masculine Christianity". Ryle taught that women are fellow heirs of the grace of life (**1 Peter 3:7**).

And as you study his Ministry, it is clear that Bishop Ryle believed and taught that the fullest flourishing of women and men takes place in Churches and in families where Christianity has this "God-ordained, masculine feel". So, for the sake of the glory of women,

and for the sake of the security and joy of children, God has made Christianity to have a masculine feel. He has ordained for His Church a Masculine Ministry.

Now anytime you go down this road, there is a danger of serious misunderstanding and serious abuse, because there are certain manifestations of strong masculinity that we are all familiar with, that seem to neither be godly nor loving. And the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was not immune to either the misunderstandings or the abuse. And therefore, JC Ryle's vision of Godly Masculinity was filled with persecution, ridicule, and opposition.

First of all, words are always inadequate when describing deep and profound and eternal issues. And that is why there are many different people who write down many songs and many books and many poems and many sermons and many articles that exist to try to describe the highest and best and most powerful ideas and concepts.

What Bishop JC Ryle meant by the terms "Masculine Christianity," or "Masculine Ministry," or "Godly Masculinity" or "Christianity with a masculine feel," is this:

"Theology and church and mission are marked by overarching godly male leadership in the Spirit of Christ, with an ethos of tender-hearted strength, and contrite courage, and risk-taking decisiveness, and a readiness to sacrifice for the sake of leading, protecting, and providing for the community—all of which is possible only through the Death and Resurrection of Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

So, the Godly Masculinity in the world of John Charles Ryle was the "feel" of a great and majestic God, Who by His redeeming Work in Jesus Christ, inclines *men* to take humble, Christ-exalting initiatives, and inclines *women* to come alongside the men with joyful support, intelligent helpfulness, and fruitful partnership in the work. And not only is that taught in Scripture, it is truly a thing of beauty when it exists in the home and in the Church.

Now John Charles Ryle was born May 10, 1816, near Macclesfield, in the County of Cheshire, England. His parents were nominal members of the Church of England with no interest in vital religion,

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<sup>1</sup> Archbishop McGee called him in 1868 "the frank and manly Mr. Ryle." Eric Russell, *J. C. Ryle: That Man of Granite with the Heart of a Child* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), 9.

and would never embrace Ryle's Evangelical Faith, which he came to when he was 21 years old.

At the age of eight, he was sent to a boarding school for three years, of which he later remarked when he was 58:

“I'm quite certain that I learned more moral evil in a private school than I ever did in my whole life afterwards.”<sup>2</sup>

A month later, at the age of eleven, he was sent to Eton, the elite preparatory school, founded in 1440, and stayed there almost seven years, until he was eighteen.

“Religion,” he says, “was at a very low ebb, and most boys knew far more about the heathen gods and goddesses than about Jesus Christ. . . . on Sundays there was nothing whatever to do us any good; the preaching of the fellows was beneath contempt.”<sup>3</sup>

In October of 1834, Ryle entered Christ Church, Oxford, where he stayed exactly three years till he was 21. He won the Craven University Scholarship, but in spite of his achievements he said:

“I thoroughly disliked Oxford on many accounts. . . . Nothing disgusted me so much as the miserable idolatry of money and also of aristocratic connection. I never saw such an amount of toadying flattery, and fawning upon wealth and title as I saw among the undergraduates at Oxford.”<sup>4</sup>

And later, from his perspective as a believer, he wrote:

“At Oxford things were very little better [than Eton]. No one cared for our souls any more than if we had been a pack of heathen.”<sup>5</sup>

So, up till the age of 21, Ryle says:

“I had no true religion at all. . . . I certainly never said my prayers, or read a word of my Bible, from the time I was 7 to the time I was 21. . . . My

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Toon, editor, *J. C. Ryle: A Self-Portrait, A Partial Autobiography* (Swengel, Pennsylvania: Reiner Publications, 1975, 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Self-portrait*; 19

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*; 30

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*; 38

father's house was respectable and well conducted but there really was not a bit of [true] religion in it."<sup>6</sup>

... but things were about to change dramatically.

"About the end of 1837 [just after Oxford], my character underwent a thorough and entire change, in consequence of a complete alteration in my view of religion. . . . This change was . . . extremely great and has had . . . a sweeping influence over the whole of my life ever since."<sup>7</sup>

At least three things conspired to bring this about. First, a severe illness confined him to bed.

"That was the time when I distinctly remember I began to read my Bible and began to pray."<sup>8</sup>

... then a new Gospel Ministry opened in his hometown.

"Till that time, there was no ministry of the Gospel at the Church we attended. [My hometown] had only two churches, and in neither of them was the gospel preached."<sup>9</sup>

But then a new Church was opened and the Gospel was preached, and Ryle was contrarian enough to be attracted to it when everyone was criticizing it.

"There was a kind of stir among dry bones, and great outcry against the attendants of this new Church. This also worked for my good. My natural independence, combativeness, and love of minorities, and hearty dislike for swimming with the stream, combined to make me think that these new evangelical preachers who were so sneered at and disliked were probably right."<sup>10</sup>

The third influence was some good evangelical books that came into his hands. He mentions Wilberforce's *Practical View of*

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid; 35

<sup>7</sup> Ibid; 35&36

<sup>8</sup> Ibid; 40

<sup>9</sup> Ibid; 36

<sup>10</sup> Ibid; 39

*Christianity, Angel James's Christian Professor, Scott's Reply to Bishop Tomline, Newton's Cardiaphonia, Milner's Church History, and Bickersteth's Christian Student.*<sup>11</sup>

So, God used Ryle's sickness, the gospel preacher, and the evangelical books, and by the beginning of 1838, he says:

"I was fairly launched as a Christian, and started on the road which I think I have never entirely left, from that time to this."<sup>12</sup>

He often related what the Truths were that the Holy Spirit pressed on his soul during those days:

"Nothing . . . appeared to me so clear and distinct, as my own sinfulness, Christ's Preciousness, the Value of the Bible, the absolute necessity of coming out of the world, the need of being born again, the enormous folly of the whole Doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration. All these things, I repeat, seemed to flash upon me like a sunbeam in the winter of 1837 and have stuck in my mind from that time down to this.

People may account for such a change as they like, my own belief is that no rational explanation of it can be given but that of the Bible; it was what the Bible calls 'conversion' or 'regeneration.' Before that time, I was dead in sins and on the high road to hell, and from that time I have become alive and had a hope of Heaven. And nothing to my mind can account for it, but the free Sovereign Grace of God. And it was the greatest change and event in my life, and has been an Influence over the whole of my subsequent history."<sup>13</sup>

For the next three and a half years, he mainly worked in the bank that his father owned. Then disaster struck in June 1841, when he was 25 years old. His father lost everything in bankruptcy. Ryle describes this event as so traumatic that:

"...if I had not been a Christian at that time, I do not know if I should not have committed suicide. Every single acre and penny my father possessed had to be given up to meet the demand of the creditors. . . . We got up one

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid; 40

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid; 42&43

summer's morning with all the world before us as usual, and went to bed that same night completely and entirely ruined."<sup>14</sup>

His own testimony about the effect of this disaster on his life is remarkable:

“God alone knows how the iron entered into my soul . . . . I am quite certain it inflicted a wound on my body and mind of which I feel the effects most heavily at this day [he is writing this 32 years later in 1873] and shall feel it if I live to be hundred. To suppose that people do not feel things because they do not scream and yell and fill the air with their cries, is simple nonsense. . . . *I do not think there has been a single day in my life for 32 years, that I have not remembered the . . . humiliation.*”<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, Ryle believed in the Sovereignty of God and knew that this event was decisive in making him what he was;

“I have not the least doubt it was all for the best. If . . . I had never been ruined, my life of course would have been a very different one. I should have probably gone into Parliament . . . I should never have been a clergyman, never have preached, written a tract or a book. Perhaps I might have made shipwreck in spiritual things. So, I do not mean to say at all, that I wish it to have been different to what it was.”<sup>16</sup>

But now what would he do? He had no idea.

“The plans of my life were broken up at the age of 25. . . I was going to leave my father's house without the least idea what was going to happen, where I was going to live, or what I was going to do.”<sup>17</sup>

The Pastor over the Parish of Fawley, Rev. Gibson, knew of Ryle's conversion and leadership gifts, and asked him to be the “curate of Exbury”. It was a strange way to enter the Ministry in which he would become the foremost Evangelical spokesman of the Church of England in his day.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid; 51-54

<sup>15</sup> Ibid; 55

<sup>16</sup> Ibid; 56

<sup>17</sup> Ibid; 54



“I never had any particular desire to become a clergyman, and those who fancied that my self-will and natural tastes were gratified by it were totally and entirely mistaken. I became a clergyman because I felt shut up to do it, and saw no other course of life open me.”<sup>18</sup>

His parents did not like the idea, but could suggest nothing better, and so he accepted the offer “*with a very heavy heart,*” and was ordained by the Bishop of Winchester in December, 1841. But the people loved him.

“I think they would have done anything for me,” he says, although “on the whole . . . I think I was regarded as an enthusiastic, fanatical mad dog of whom most people were afraid.”<sup>19</sup>

Ryle then began a strict regimen where he studied Scripture for hours on end, prepared two written sermons each Sunday, spoke extemporaneously on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, visited 60 families each week, and during an outbreak of scarlet fever, he says:

“I saved many lives . . . by supplying them with large quantities of beef tea, made from concentrated essence, and insisted on their swallowing it, as long as their throats kept open.”<sup>20</sup>

The Church was soon filled on Sunday. But he resigned in two years (November, 1843) for health reasons.

“The Church thoroughly disagreed with me. . . . Constant headache, indigestion, and disturbances of the heart then began and have been the plagues, and have disturbed me ever since that time.”<sup>21</sup>

After five months, Ryle accepted a Call to be the Pastor at Helmingham, about 85 miles northeast of London, where he began on Easter Sunday, 1844. He was now 28 years old and still unmarried. Not until now had his income been sufficient to support a wife, which was

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid; 59

<sup>19</sup> Ibid; 63

<sup>20</sup> Ibid; 62

<sup>21</sup> Ibid; 64

one of the reasons he accepted this Call after only five months at Winchester.<sup>22</sup> But this time, he stayed 17 years.

In October, 1844, his first year there, he married Matilda Plumbpre. She was 22, and he was 28. A child, Georgina, was born May 1846, and Matilda died June 1847. Ryle was married again in February, 1849, to Jessie Walker, but their ten years together were years of “singular trials.” Jessie was never well.

On five different occasions, Ryle’s wife had to be confined in London for two months each, and one side effect was that he preached in at least sixty different churches in London and became very popular for his power in the pulpit, to which he responded:

“I always felt that popularity, as it was called, was a very worthless thing and a very bad thing for man's soul.”<sup>23</sup>

Jessie bore Ryle four children over the ten years of their marriage, Isabelle, Reginald, Herbert, and Arthur. But then in May 1860, after a long battle with Bright’s disease, Jessie died. The last five years, she was unable to do much at all, and when she died the entire load of the five children, with the oldest only thirteen, fell to their father, *especially* the three little boys.

“As to holidays, rest, and relaxation in the year, I never had any at all; while the whole business of entertaining and amusing the three little boys in evening devolved entirely upon me. In fact, the whole state of things was a heavy strain upon me, both in body and mind, and I often wonder how I lived through it.”<sup>24</sup>

Ryle’s middle son, Herbert, recalls the early days of childhood with their father:

“He was everything to us—taught us games, natural history, astronomy, and insisted on our never being idle, and carefully fostered our love of books. To us boys he was extraordinarily indulgent. And he was tolerant to a degree

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–69. “I must honestly say that I went very unwillingly, and of all the steps I ever took in my life, to this day I feel doubts whether the move was right or not. I sometimes think that it was a want of faith to go, and I ought to have stayed. . . . But I have never ceased to wonder whether I was right or not. I only know that my chief desire was to set my father free from any charge on my account, and so I tried to hope all was right. But I think the doubt afflicted my spirits for two or three years.”

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*; 80

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*; 81

little known or recognized. The High Church writers sought to destroy his position by detraction. Much as he differed from me in many points, he never suffered the shadow of a difference to come between us in the intimacy of our affection. And since the time I went to school at the age of nine and a half, I never received from him a harsh word.”<sup>25</sup>

Whether Ryle was an attentive father or not, none of his sons remained true to his Evangelical Faith. Reginald became a doctor with no professed Christian faith. Arthur became an artist with no religious inclinations. And Herbert was ordained in the Church of England, and eventually became Bishop of Winchester, and Dean of Westminster. Though he became liberal in his theology, there remained a bond of affection between him and his father.

Herbert outlived his brothers and wrote:

“The last of the five, I remain, having had two such loving brothers as few men ever had—never a quarrel, always affection and confidence.”<sup>26</sup>

When his father died he wrote to a friend:

“And I, to whom it was an intense stimulus to think of pleasing my father as a boy and a young man, feel how greatly he has filled the picture of my life.”<sup>27</sup>

The year after Jessie died, Ryle accepted a call to be the Vicar of Stradbroke, about 20 miles north of Helmingham. He had served 17 years in the tiny village of Helmingham, and would now serve Stradbroke for another 19 years. The year he began at Stradbroke, he was married a third time, October 24, 1861, to Henrietta Legh-Clowes. He was 45, she was 36, and they were married for 28 years, until she died in 1889, eleven years before his own death in 1900.

During the 36 years in rural parishes of Helmingham and Stradbroke, Ryle was becoming a national figure of prominence in the

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<sup>25</sup> J. I. Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness: The Witness of J. C. Ryle* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002), 69–70.

<sup>26</sup> Eric Russell, *J. C. Ryle: That Man of Granite with the Heart of a Child* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), 85.

<sup>27</sup> Eric Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 250.

Church of England. He was constantly writing and traveling to speak. One historian said:

“[JC Ryle] was Evangelicalism’s best-known and most respected writer and spokesman through the 1870s.”<sup>28</sup>

Another said:

“During the . . . years he spent in his two Suffolk parishes, he was a prolific writer, producing evangelistic tracts, devotional commentaries, historical and biographical accounts, works on doctrinal and controversial subjects, papers on Christianity and prophecy, all unashamedly written from the standpoint of a convinced Evangelical and Protestant Churchman.”<sup>29</sup>

Virtually all of the books and tracts that Ryle published had been first given as sermons or lectures. The main books were all published during his time at Stradbroke: *Knots Untied* (1874), his most popular work during his lifetime, *Old Paths* (1877), *Holiness* (1877, enlarged 1879), the book he is most famous for today, *Practical Religion* (1878), which he said should be read in conjunction with *Holiness*.

One of the great ironies of Ryle’s life is that he took a brilliant first class in classics at Oxford, was a constant reader of old and new theology, collected a five-thousand-volume library, and yet, in tiny rural parishes, became “the Prince of tract writers.”<sup>30</sup> Now, “tracts” in those days were little booklets, which in Ryle’s case, had first been sermons, and which sold for pennies. The fact that Ryle put such a premium on publishing practical tracts on Christian living and Church life shows how zealous he was for personal holiness and Church reform. In writing and preaching, he was first a pastor, and “as he read,” J. I. Packer points out, “alongside the question ‘Is it true?’ the question ‘What effect will this have on ordinary people?’ was always in his mind.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 51.

<sup>29</sup> Russell, 103.

<sup>30</sup> Russell, 70. To give some idea of the extent of the effectiveness of these tracts here is one story. “One little booklet called True Liberty was translated into Spanish. It came into the hands of a Dominican Friar who had been sent to stamp out the reform movement in the church in that part of Mexico. As he read the tract the scales fell from his eyes and he entered by faith into the true liberty of the sons of God. He began to build up the church he meant to destroy. The church grew in half a century from a tiny remnant of a few believers into a flourishing church of some fifty thousand members.” (72)

<sup>31</sup> *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 71.

Not only was Ryle a Pastor in all he wrote, but he was a firmly rooted Anglican churchman with a strong allegiance to the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-Nine Articles. He had a huge heart and huge respect for Dissenters and those on the outside, like Charles Spurgeon,<sup>32</sup> but he was un-budging in his passion that the Church of England, rightly administered was the best Church on earth.<sup>33</sup>

“The standpoint I have tried to occupy, from first to last, is that of an Evangelical Churchman.”<sup>34</sup>

His passion was for the reformation and renewal of his own denomination, in accord with the great Biblical Principles of the Reformation.

At the age of 64, after 36 years in rural parishes, when most people are ready to retire, he was called to be the first Bishop of Liverpool.<sup>35</sup> So he moved from parishes of 300 and 1300 to a city of over 700,000 with all the urban problems he had never met face to face. He served in this post for 20 years, till two months before his death on June 9, 1900, at the age of 84.

Here he poured himself out for the spiritual Good of the city and took serious initiatives to relieve some of the worst social ills.

“During his time 42 new churches were built in the diocese. The number of clergy increased by 146, and confirmations almost doubled.”<sup>36</sup>

The book with the most detail about his gospel efforts in Liverpool is Ian D. Farley's, *J. C. Ryle: First Bishop of Liverpool* (Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2000). On his gravestone, there are two

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<sup>32</sup>“When you read Mr. Spurgeon sermons, note how clearly and perspicuously he divides a sermon, and fills each division with beautiful and simple ideas. How easily you grasp his meaning! . . . great truths, that hang to you like hooks of steel, and which you never forget! Spurgeon once called Ryle the best man in the Church of England; here Ryle in effect hails Spurgeon as the best preacher anywhere in the country.” *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 62.

<sup>33</sup>“I am satisfied that well administered, the Church of England is more calculated to help souls to heaven than any church on earth. . . . I am deeply convinced of the excellency of my own Church—I would even say, if it were not a proud boast, its superiority over any other church upon earth.” *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 45, 48. “He believed that the Episcopal government rightly administered is the best form of church government.” Eric Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 128.

<sup>34</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Practical Religion*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998, orig, 1878), vi.

<sup>35</sup> There seemed to be some political intrigue behind this appointment. Some said that Benjamin Disraeli, the Prime Minister at the time, made this appointment of an outspoken conservative to spite William Gladstone who had just defeated him in an election and had come from an Anglo-Catholic family in Liverpool. *Self-Portrait*, 90.

<sup>36</sup>*Self-Portrait*, 101.

verses of Scripture to capture the two aspects of the Christian life that he heralded, the fight, and the gift. First:

**2 Timothy 4:7**

**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;**

And then:

**Ephesians 2:8**

**For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;**

Now of all the helpful things that could be said about the life and ministry of J. C. Ryle, none are more important than, "The Value of a Masculine Ministry". And no one illustrated this Godly Masculinity better than JC Ryle. So, here are eight characteristics of a Godly Masculine Ministry that I got from the Life and Ministry of JC Ryle:

**1. A Masculine Ministry believes that it is more fitting that men take the lash of criticism that must come in a public ministry, than to unnecessarily expose women to this assault.**

Therefore, a Masculine Ministry puts men at the head of the troop with the flag in hand and the trumpets in their mouths, so that they, and not the women, take the first bullets.

J. C. Ryle was a very controversial figure in British Evangelicalism. He saw liberalism and ritualism and worldliness eating away at the heart of the Church of England, and he took such clear stands against these things that criticism against him was sometimes brutal. For example, in 1885, the *Liverpool Review* (November 21, 1885) published this assessment:

"Dr. Ryle is simply about the most disastrous Episcopal failure ever inflicted upon a long-suffering diocese. . . . He is nothing better than a political fossil, who has been very unwisely unearthed from his rural obscurity for no better purpose apparently than to make the Episcopacy ridiculous."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Farley, *J. C. Ryle: First Bishop of Liverpool*, 236.

Two years later, another paper, *Figaro* (May 14, 1887), said:

“His name will stink in history. . . . It is to be regretted that he was ever appointed to fill a position in which he has done more mischief than the Liberation Society and all the atheists put together.”<sup>38</sup>

And the point here is *not* that a woman couldn't endure such assaults. No doubt a godly woman could. The point is *not* that women can't endure criticism, but that godly men prefer to take it for them, rather than thrust them into it.

Courage, in the midst of combat, especially harsh and painful combat, whether with arms or with words, is *not* something a woman *can't* exercise, nor even something she *shouldn't* exercise under certain circumstances. The reason we call such courage “manly” is *not* that a woman is unable to show it, but that we feel a sense of fitness and joy when a man steps up to risk his life, or his career, with courage, and that we (should) feel awkward if a woman is thrust into that role on behalf of men. She may be able to do it, and we may admire her for doing it, if necessary. But we wish the men were numerous enough and strong enough and courageous enough that the women could rejoice in the men, rather than take their place.

## **2. A Masculine Ministry seizes on full-orbed, biblical doctrine with a view to teaching it to the church and pressing it with courage into the lives of the people.**

Behind the increasing liberalism, ritualism, and worldliness that he saw in the church, Ryle saw a failure of doctrinal nerve, an unmanly failure. Dislike of dogma, he wrote:

... is an epidemic which is just now doing great harm, and especially among young people. . . . It produces what I must venture to call . . . a “jelly-fish” Christianity . . . a Christianity without bone, or muscle, or power. . . . Alas! It is a type of much of the religion of this day, of which the leading principle is, “no dogma, no distinct tenets, no positive doctrine.” We have hundreds

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 224.

of “jellyfish” clergyman, who seem not to have a single bone in their body of divinity. They have no definite opinions... they are so afraid of “extreme views” that they have no views of all.

We have thousands of “jellyfish” sermons preached every year, sermons without an edge, or a point, or corner, smooth as billiard balls, awakening no sinner, and edifying no saint. . . .

And worst of all, we have myriads of “jellyfish” worshipers—respectable Church-gone people, who have no distinct and definite views about any point in theology. They cannot discern things that differ, any more than colorblind people can distinguish colors. . . . They are “tossed to and fro, like children, by every wind of doctrine”; . . . ever ready for new things, because they have no firm grasp on the old.<sup>39</sup>

This aversion to sound, biblical Doctrine was the root cause of the Church’s maladies, and the remedy was a manly affirmation of what he called “sharply cut doctrines”<sup>40</sup> recovered from the Reformation and the Puritans and the giants of the eighteenth century in England. Ryle warned his denomination:

“Mark what I say. If you want to do good in these times, you must throw aside indecision, and take up a distinct, sharply-cut, doctrinal religion...The victories of Christianity, wherever they have been won, have been won by distinct doctrinal theology; by telling men roundly of Christ’s vicarious death and sacrifice; by showing them Christ’s substitution on the cross, and His precious blood; by teaching them justification by faith, and bidding them believe on a crucified Saviour; by preaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Spirit; by lifting up the brazen serpent; by telling men to look and live—to believe, repent, and be converted. . . .

Show us at this day any English village, or parish, or city, or town, or district, which has been evangelized without “dogma.” . . . Christianity without distinct doctrine is a powerless thing. . . . No dogma, no fruits!”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Principles for Churchmen* (London: William Hunt, 8 1084), 97–98. Quoted in J. I. Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 72–73.

<sup>40</sup> J. C. Ryle, *The Christian Leaders of The Last Century, or England A Hundred Years Ago* (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2002), 392.

<sup>41</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2001), 355–356.



The point of calling this failure of Doctrinal Nerve an “unmanly failure” is *not* that women can't grasp and hold fast to the great Doctrines of the Christian Faith. They can and should. The point is that when the Foundations of the Church are crumbling, the men should *not* stand still and wait for women to seize the tools and brick and mortar. And women should expect their men to be at the forefront of rebuilding the ruins.

The point of saying that the remedy for “doctrinal indifference” is a *manly* affirmation of “sharply cut doctrines” is *not* that women cannot or should not make such affirmations. The point is that long, hard, focused, mental labor should not be shirked by men. Men should feel a special *responsibility* for the life and safety and joy of the community that depends on putting these “sharply cut doctrines” in place. This issue is not what women are *able* to do, but what men *ought* to do.

J. C. Ryle waited for no one. He took the brick and mortar and trowel and spent his whole life rebuilding the sharp edges of gloriously clear Truth to make a place where men and women could flourish in the Gospel.

### **3. A Masculine Ministry brings out the more rugged aspects of the Christian life and presses them on the conscience of the Church with a demeanor that accords with their proportion in Scripture.**

Ryle is most famous today for his work on Holiness and Sanctification. And the overwhelming impression you get in reading his book on Holiness is how unsentimental and rugged most of it feels.<sup>42</sup> That is, it feels very much like the New Testament, especially the Four Gospels.

Over against the perfectionism and Keswick quietism of his day, he was unrelenting in stressing that Sanctification, unlike Justification, is a process of constant engagement of the will. And that engagement is war. He asked:

“Is it wise to teach believers that they ought not to think so much of fighting and struggling against sin, but ought rather to ‘yield themselves to God’ and

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<sup>42</sup>“Ryle was habitually factual and unsentimental in his account of things.” *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 71.

be passive in the hands of Christ? Is this according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it.”<sup>43</sup>

In his day, Ryle thundered:

“True Christianity is a fight.”<sup>44</sup>

... and not for the faint of heart. Then he cited, **1 Timothy 1:18-19; 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3; Ephesians 6:11-13; Luke 13:24; John 6:27; Matthew 10:34; Luke 22:36; and 1 Corinthians 16:13** as proof. Then he said:

“Words such as these appear to me clear, plain, and unmistakable. They all teach one and the same great lesson. . . . That true Christianity is a struggle, a fight, and a warfare.”<sup>45</sup>

“A true Christian,” he said, “is one who has not only peace of conscience, but war within.”<sup>46</sup>

And this is true at every stage of maturity. Ryle said:

“The old, the sick, the dying, are never known to repent of fighting Christ’s battles against sin.”<sup>47</sup>

The tone Ryle set for the Christian life is:

“... the soldier’s life. A holy violence, a conflict, a warfare, a fight, a soldier’s life, a wrestling, are spoken of as characteristic of the true Christian.”<sup>48</sup>

“He that would understand the nature of true holiness must know that the Christian is “a man of war.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, xix.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*; 63

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*; 66

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*; 26

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*; 76

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, xxviii

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*; 63

Of course, this is not the *only* picture of the Christian life, but it is a true and prominent one. And Ryle sets it forth with clarity and with a tone that fits the “soldier-like” theme it is. But the point, again, is *not* that women *cannot*, or *should not*, fight sin with as much urgency as any man. Nor is the point that she is somehow *unable* to see these things in Scripture, bring them out, and press them on the conscience. She is fully able to do that.

The point is that the theme of Christian warfare and other rugged aspects of biblical theology and life should draw the men of the Church to take them up in the spirit of a protective warrior in his family and “tribe,” rather than expecting the women to take on the spirit of a combatant for the sake of the Church.

#### **4. A Masculine Ministry takes up heavy and painful Realities in the Bible, and puts them forward to those who may not want to hear them.**

One of the heaviest and most painful Realities in the Bible is the Reality of Hell. It is a godly and loving and manly responsibility of the leaders of the Church not to distort or minimize the weight and horror of hell. Ryle faced the same thing we do. In 1855, he preached the sermon that 24 years later was published in the expanded edition of *Holiness*. There he said:

“I feel constrained to speak freely to my readers on the subject of Hell. . . . I believe the time is come when it is a positive duty to speak plainly about the reality and eternity of Hell. A flood of false doctrine has lately broken in upon us. Men are beginning to tell us ‘that God is too merciful to punish souls for ever—that there is a love of God lower even than Hell—and that all mankind, however wicked and ungodly some of them may be, will sooner or later be saved.’ . . . We are to embrace what is called a ‘kinder theology.’ . . . Against such false teaching I desire, for one, to protest. Painful, sorrowful, distressing as the controversy may be, we must not blink it, or refuse to look the subject in the face. I, for one, am resolved to maintain the old position, and to assert the reality and eternity of Hell.”<sup>50</sup>

... Ryle pointed out that no one in Scripture “*used so many words to express the awfulness of hell*” as Jesus did.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid; 208

“Hell”, “hell fire”, “the damnation of hell”, “eternal damnation”, “the resurrection of damnation”, “everlasting fire”, “the place of torment”, “destruction”, “outer darkness”, “the worm that never dies”, “the fire that is not quenched”, “the place of weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth”, “everlasting punishment”, these are the words and phrases which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself used.<sup>51</sup>

Ryle confessed that these words and phrases sound dreadful. But then, said that that was irrelevant. The question was not, “do these terms sit well with us”. The question, Bishop Ryle asked, was “*Is it Scriptural?*” And if they are biblical terms, then we must not shrink back from using them. Ryle said:

“Professing Christians ought to be often reminded that they may be deceived about their conversion and are actually lost and will go to hell.”<sup>52</sup>

But Ryle’s “manly courage” that takes up heavy and painful Biblical Truths and presses them on people, who may not want to hear them, was *not* a “callous courage”. One time he remarked:

“God knows that I never speak of hell without pain and sorrow. I would gladly offer the salvation of the Gospel to the very chief of sinners. I would willingly say to the vilest and most profligate of mankind on his deathbed, “Repent, and believe on Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.”<sup>53</sup>

Once again, the point here is not that women are somehow *unable* to lift the weight or bear the pain of the Reality of Hell. The point is *not* that they are *unable* to press it into those who don’t want to hear. The point is that one of the marks of Mature Manhood is the *inclination* to spare her that load and its costs. We admire all women who embrace the Truth. We share her longings to nurture with tenderness, and, if we can, we carry for her the flaming coals of final Condemnation.

**5. A Masculine Ministry heralds the Truth of Scripture, with urgency and forcefulness and penetrating conviction, to the world and in the regular worship services of the Church.**

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid 210

<sup>52</sup> Ibid 211

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

Not all preachers have the same personality or the same tone. Some are louder, some are softer. Some speak faster, some slower. Some with long sentences, some with short. Some with many word pictures, some with fewer. Some with manifest emotion, some with less. Some with lots of gestures, some with few. These differences are inevitable.

But "Preaching", as opposed to "Teaching", *kerussein* (Greek) as opposed to *didaskein*, involves a kind of emotional engagement signified by the word "*heralding*."

There is, in Gospel Preaching, a kind of *urgency* and a kind of *forcefulness*. A Message is being delivered from the King of the Universe, with His Authority, in His Name and to His Glory. And this Message deals with matters of *infinite* Importance, and the *eternal* Destiny of the hearers hangs on how they *respond* to the Message.

That is Preaching. And no matter what a preacher's personality or preferred tone, this Preaching *necessarily* involves "urgency" and "forcefulness" and a "penetrating conviction" which aims to come with Divine Thrust into the minds and hearts of the listeners. And therefore, this is a "manly" task. Coming to a people with an Authoritative Word from God, aiming to subdue the hearts of men, and summon them into battle, and lead the charge at their head against the principalities and powers, this is where men belong.

J. C. Ryle's preaching is a model for preaching in these ways. J. I. Packer referred to his:

"electric force of utterance."<sup>54</sup>

Ryle knew that he had to crucify his florid,<sup>55</sup> literary style which marked his early preaching. The nature of preaching demanded something different. Something simpler, but more forceful and penetrating. What developed was really astonishing. Packer describes it, referring to his:

"...brisk, spare, punchy style . . . its cultivated forcefulness, its use of the simplest words, its fusillades of short, one-clause sentences . . . its a rib-

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<sup>54</sup>*Faithfulness and Holiness*, 11.

<sup>55</sup> "I felt that I was doing the country people in my congregation [of Exbury] no good whatever. I was shooting over their heads; they could not understand my imitation of Melville's style, which I thought much of, therefore I thought it my plain duty to crucify my style and bring it down to what it is now." Eric Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 60.

jabbing drumbeat rhetoric, its easy logical flow, its total lack of sentimentality, and its resolve to call a spade a spade.”<sup>56</sup>

Ryle knew that the preaching of his day was languishing. It was “dry, heavy, stiff, dull, cold, tame . . . and destitute of warmth, vivacity, direct appeal, or fire.”<sup>57</sup> So he made every effort to break the mold, even as a dignified Bishop of Liverpool. He would keep it simple, but he would “un-tame his preaching”. His simple, forceful, clarity was renown. One older lady came to the church hoping to hear the Bishop, but afterwards said to a friend:

“I never heard a Bishop before. I thought I’d hear something great. . . JC Ryle is no Bishop. I could understand every word.”<sup>58</sup>

... Ryle took that as a great compliment.

Listen to what Packer means by the “electric force” of “fusillades” and “rib-jabbing, drumbeat rhetoric.” The following is from a sermon that Ryle preached on Lot’s lingering as he came out of Sodom and how so many Christians linger as they leave sin:

“Would you know what the times demand?—The shaking of nations—the uprooting of ancient things—the overturning of kingdoms—the stir and restlessness of men’s minds—what do they say? They all cry aloud—Christian! do not linger!

Would you be found ready for Christ at His second appearing—your loins girded—your lamp burning—yourself bold, and prepared to meet Him? Then do not linger! . . .

Would you enjoy strong assurance of your own salvation, in the day of sickness, and on the bed of death?—Would you see with the eye of faith heaven opening and Jesus rising to receive you? Then do not linger!

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<sup>56</sup> *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 19. Examples of his punchy, aphoristic style are almost everywhere. For example, from his book, *Thoughts for Young Men*: “The poorest saint that ever died in a ghetto is nobler in His sight than the richest sinner that ever died in a palace.” (Kindle, location 414) “Never make an intimate friend of anyone who is not a friend of God.” (Kindle, location 485) “Bad company in this life, is the sure way to procure worse company in the life to come.” (Kindle, location 518) “The gospel keeps many a person from going to jail and from being hanged, if it does not keep him from hell.” (Kindle, location 632) And some quoted by Eric Russell: “What we weave in time, we wear in eternity.” “Sin forsaken is one of the best evidences of sin forgiven.” “It matters little how we die, but it matters much how we live.” “One thief on the cross was saved, that none should despair, and only one, that none should presume.”

<sup>57</sup>Ian Farley, *J. C. Ryle, First Bishop of Liverpool*, 103.

<sup>58</sup>Eric Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 253.

Would you leave great broad evidences behind you when you are gone?—Would you like us to lay you in the grave with comfortable hope, and talk of your state after death without a doubt? Then do not linger!

Would you be useful to the world in your day and generation?—Would you draw men from sin to Christ, adorn your doctrine, and make your Master's cause beautiful and attractive in their eyes? Then do not linger!

Would you help your children and relatives towards heaven, and make them say, “We will go with you”?—and not make them infidels and despisers of all religion? Then do not linger!

Would you have a great crown in the day of Christ's appearing, and not be the least and smallest star in glory, and not find yourself the last and lowest in the kingdom of God? Then do not linger!

Oh, let not one of us linger! Time does not—death does not—judgment does not—the devil does not—the world does not. Neither let the children of God linger.<sup>59</sup>

There is urgency, forcefulness, and penetrating power in that. Preaching does not always rise to this level of urgency and force and authority, but regularly does, and should. Again, the point is *not* that a woman is *not* able to speak this way. The point is that godly men know *intuitively*, by the masculine nature implanted by God, that turning the hearts of men and women to God with that kind of Authoritative Speaking is the responsibility of men. And where men handle it with humility and grace, godly women are glad.

**6. A Masculine Ministry welcomes the challenges and costs of strong, courageous leadership without complaint or self-pity with a view to putting in place principles and structures and plans and people to carry a whole Church into joyful fruitfulness.**

Leadership in the Church, tending and feeding and protecting and leading the sheep, is not only the work of preaching, but also a firm, clear, reasonable, wise guiding voice when it comes to hundreds of decisions that have to be made. This calls for great discernment and no little strength. There are a hundred ways that a Church can drift into ineffectiveness, and wise leaders spot these early, resist them, and win the church joyfully into a better direction. And what is required again

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<sup>59</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, 193.

and again is a decisive strength that does not weaken in the face of resistance.

Packer describes Ryle's leadership like this:

“His brains, energy, vision, drive, independence, clear head, kind heart, fair-mind, salty speech, good sense, impatience with stupidity, firmness of principle, and freedom from inhibitions would have made him a leader in any field.”<sup>60</sup>

Ryle was called by his successor to the bishopric of Liverpool, “*that man of granite with the heart of a child.*”<sup>61</sup> He was described as “*the most rugged and conservative of all Anglican Evangelical personalities.*”<sup>62</sup> He said of his own leadership:

“The story of my life has been such that I really cared nothing for anyone's opinion, and I resolved not to consider one jot who was offended and who was not offended by anything I did.”<sup>63</sup>

These are the words of man surrounded by a rising tide of liberalism, ritualism, and worldliness in the Church of England. They are the voice of strength against overwhelming odds.

“I am fully aware [he wrote in 1878] that Evangelical churchmanship is not popular and acceptable in this day. It is despised by many. . . . But none of these things move me. I am not ashamed of my opinions. After 40 years of Bible reading and praying, meditation, and theological study, I find myself clinging more tightly than ever to “Evangelical” religion, and more than ever satisfied with it.

None of these things move me. More than ever I am satisfied with [the evangelical faith].”<sup>64</sup>

Immovable joy in Truth is a precious trait in the leaders of the Church. A Masculine Ministry looks on the forces to be resisted, and the

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<sup>60</sup> *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Eric Russell, *J. C. Ryle*, 9

<sup>62</sup> Ian Farley, *J. C. Ryle: First Bishop of Liverpool*, 123.

<sup>63</sup> *Self-Portrait*, 67.

<sup>64</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Shall We Know One Another, and Other Papers* (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2001), 29, 31, 32.



magnitude of the Truth to be enjoyed, and feels a glad responsibility to carry a whole people forward into joyful fruitfulness.

## **7. A Masculine Ministry publicly and privately advocates for the vital and manifold ministries of women in the life and mission of the Church.**

The aim of godly leadership is a community of maximum joy and flourishing for everyone within, the women, the children, the men, and maximum impact on the world for the glory of Christ. It's not about the privilege of power, but about the burden of responsibility to enhance the lives of others.

Ryle was outspoken in his zeal for women in the various ministries of the church. He drew attention to **Romans 16**, where 11 of the 28 names mentioned are women, and said:

“The chapter I have mentioned appears to me to contain a special lesson for women. The important position that women occupy in the Church of Christ—the wide field of real, though unobtrusive, usefulness that lies before them . . . I cannot go away with the common notion that great usefulness is for men only, and not for women. . . . It should never be forgotten that it is not preaching alone that moves and influences men. . . . Humanly speaking, the salvation of a household often depends upon the women . . . [and] men’s character is exceedingly influenced by their homes.”<sup>65</sup>

There are countless needs in the community, and needs on the mission field, Ryle said, that cry out for the ministry of women.

“There are hundreds of cases continually rising in which a woman is far more suitable visitor than a man. She need not put on a peculiar dress, or call herself by a Roman Catholic name. She has only to go about, in the spirit of her Savior, with kindness on her lips, gentleness in her ways, and the Bible in her hands, and the good that she may do is quite incalculable. Happy indeed is the parish where there are Christian women who “go about doing good.” Happy is that minister who has such helpers.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Practical Religion*, vi–vii.

<sup>66</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Shall We Know One Another?* 36. And Ryle made a case for the Zenana Mission who specialized in sending women missionaries to India, China, and Japan. His argument was that half the population of India were women who were almost entirely secluded from men, especially foreigners.

The aim of a Masculine Ministry, then, is the fullest engagement of every member of the church in joyful, fruitful ministry. The aim of leadership is not to *be* the ministry, but to *free* the ministry, according to God's Word, by the Power of God's Spirit, for the glory of God's Name.

## **8. A Masculine Ministry models for the Church the protection, nourishing, and cherishing of a wife and children as part of the high calling of leadership.**

The year after he came to Liverpool as bishop, Ryle published a book of eight messages for children. It's called *Boys and Girls Playing*, based on **Zechariah 8:5**.<sup>67</sup> It reveals the rare mixture of concern for children along with a very masculine feel. One of the messages is called "*The Happy Little Girl*", about a girl he met in public carriage who spoke of Jesus. He asks, "*Dear children, are you as happy and as cheerful as she was?*"<sup>68</sup> And another message is called "*The Two Bears*", about the two bears that killed forty-two children for mocking God's prophet. And he says, "*Dear children, remember these things to the end of your lives. The wages of sin is death.*"<sup>69</sup> Ryle was a masculine lover of children.

Before his ministry was complete, he had loved and buried three wives, Matilde, Jessie, and Henrietta. He had three sons and two daughters. All the testimonies we have of his children praise their father for his care for them. Whether he did this well, the evidence is too sketchy to know. But what we do know is that he tried. He gives us a hint of the burden he carried in his small biography of Henry Venn, who also was made a widower in the pastoral ministry with children to care for:

“Those who have had this cross to carry, can testify that there is no position in this world so trying to body and soul as that of the minister who is left a widower, with a young family and a large congregation. There are anxieties in such cases which no one knows but he who has gone through them;

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<sup>67</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Boys and Girls Playing (and Other Addresses to Children)*, edited by Don Kistler (Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996, orig. 1881).

<sup>68</sup> Ryle, *Boys and Girls Playing*, 110.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*; 65

anxieties which can crush the strongest spirit, and wear out the strongest constitution.”<sup>70</sup>

But no matter how difficult the home-life of a pastor might be, it is part of the Calling, part of the Masculine Ministry.

Now from these eight glimpses into the value of a “Masculine Ministry”, I pray that we will adopt this concept into this Church. And I think “the frank and manly Mr. Ryle” would commend it also. I, also, commend JC Ryle to you, who not only loved his Savior, but who modeled this Masculine Ministry better than anyone I know. So, let us obey **Hebrews 13:7** and let us remember Bishop John Charles Ryle, and let us imitate his faith.

Amen. Let’s pray.

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The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

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<sup>70</sup> J. C. Ryle, *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century* (London: 1869), 279–280.