

codelife

a few thoughts about codelife and the bible

The bible is the bible, and **codelife** is not. We know that sounds obvious, but it needs to be said right at the beginning!

The reason why it needs to be said is that some people might think we are trying to replace God's word with some catchy soundbites. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, we are delighted when we hear about men getting stuck into the bible through **codelife**, because that is exactly what we want. **codelife** is simply the 'tip of the spear', the catalyst point for driving men deeper into God and His word.

Every week, millions of Christians read Christian books, watch Christian TV and listen to sermons preached either in the church or through some form of media access. Most if not all would agree that where these forms of teaching and direction are doctrinally accurate they are also helpful. They do not seek to replace scripture, but rather illuminate it.

Indeed, some of our richest insights have been handed down over the centuries as great Christians have studied God's word and shared their thoughts. Very special statements, like the Apostle's Creed, are not biblical canon but are accepted by the church as a unifying force for good.

All of these are examples of non-biblical material inspiring and leading Christians. We humbly submit **codelife** to the Christian community as one of the myriad tools we believe God has lent His grace to, and pray that it also will be a force for good.

One final thought. As you read through **codelife** you may think to yourself, 'They've missed a crucial issue!'. Well, we've worked long and hard at finding 12 brief statements that say an awful lot but we always knew we could never be absolutely 100% comprehensive. And that's fine, because the bible is comprehensive.

Remember; *tip of the spear*.

We hope you enjoy reading the following as it outlines some of the biblical thinking behind the codes.

Foundation:

Code I: **Jesus is my Captain, Brother, Rescuer and Friend.**

We know that Christ is the source of all things (*1 Corinthians 8:5-7*), but His supremacy means even more than just a remote kind of sovereignty. By his incarnation and our association with it through faith in his death and resurrection we enter into an intensely personal relationship.

In this, we see Jesus referring to us as brothers (*Mark 3:35*) and friends (*John 15:15*). The notions of 'Captain' and 'Rescuer' come from extrapolating various responses to Christ we see in the gospels. For instance, when the Roman Centurion in *Matthew 8* addresses Christ as Lord he is deferring to him as only a soldier could, acknowledging as he does so that Jesus has authority and power not only over the servant's illness, but him as well. When we as men confess Christ as Captain we similarly acknowledge that He alone has complete authority over us, and we are his to command.

Similarly, confessing Christ as 'Rescuer' sums up the wonderful work of salvation he effects upon us, through us and within us. Often we talk about salvation as if it were almost a purely academic reality, but if you were to talk to a man who was drowning, perhaps even seconds away from being lost forever, and who was then rescued, you would start to get an idea of the overwhelming gratitude and thankfulness that comes from such an experience.

We see this gratitude in the woman who washes Jesus' feet; in Zacchaeus; in Legion; in Paul and of course, many others. We are drowning men who have been brought back from the brink, and we are eternally grateful.

There is something powerful about stating the nature of a relationship (who doesn't want to hear that they are loved!?) and these confessions of what Christ means to us are the foundation of **codelife**. They remind us that everything to come emerges out of a relationship forged first and foremost by His love and grace, but also that this grace should not be taken for granted, but rather held on to with determination and commitment.

Devotion:

Code II: **I owe everything to Him. I will do anything for Him.**

'Everything' reminds us that we really have had our lives saved, and that they belong to him now. So what has Jesus really achieved in us?

- We have been set free from sin – *Romans 6:18*
- We have been made a 'chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God' and been brought out of darkness and into the light – *1 Peter 2:9*
- Jesus has given himself as a ransom for us – *Mark 10:45*
- We have been adopted as sons of God – *Ephesians 1:5*
- We have received the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing eternal life – *2 Corinthians 1:22*
- We have been given intimate access to our Heavenly Father – *Romans 8:15*

And of course the list goes on!

The point is simply this; everything we were, everything we are and everything we will be is now dealt with and full of hope in Christ. The many things we have received are not deserved, nor do we earn them (*Ephesians 2:8-10*). Without Christ we would be in sin and destined for hell; with Christ we are a new creation and headed for heaven.

'Anything' invites us to walk the walk of the people of faith who have gone before us, whether it be in enduring hardship (*Hebrews 11:32-40*), derision (*Matthew 27*) or even the downright strange (Jonah anyone?).

Jesus sums this up in his own words when he talks about the voluntary relationship between forgiveness and service:

'Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.'

Luke 7:47

Paul also expresses this himself when he shares the realisation that all his personal gain counts for nothing compared with how much he owes Jesus (*Philippians 3*) and how much he is going to strive to live full-on for Christ.

This wholehearted devotion flies in the face of the often lukewarm, contingent commitment we see prevalent in the church. It builds on the foundation of the previous code and gets us ready for the high aspirations of the codes to follow.

Witness:

Code III: I will unashamedly make Him known through my actions and words.

'What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.'

Luke 9:25-26

Here we have a warning and a calling. The warning is that if we fail to stand for Christ, he in turn will not stand for us. The calling is, of course, to stand by Christ and his teaching.

Not everyone is an evangelist, but fortunately that isn't the challenge here. Just as Jesus explain further in the 'salt and light' parables (*Matthew 5:13-14*), making Him known is simply about letting our actions and words be a transparent lens through which people see our inner conviction in Him.

It's way too easy to lead a two-tier Christian life whereby we hide our faith at work and play and only uncover it on a Sunday. This is being ashamed of Christ.

The solution is not to bible bash, which in itself can bring disrepute to Christianity, but rather to be simple, open and honest about who we are and what we believe. It may take many months at work before it seems right to say something about our faith but we should be praying and looking for the right opportunity, rather than hoping that nobody guesses.

In fact codelife itself can only shine when lived this 'gospel lifestyle' way. It's not meant to simply be a personal morality system! Anyway, that would just be another legalistic system and we know what Jesus thought of those ...

The first martyr, Stephen (*Acts 6-7*), didn't want to be stoned to death but was unable to do anything other than confess Christ and the truth of His grace, such was his experience of God's goodness and love. It led to his death, but he was solid to the end.

In the West, the worst we will usually face is a little derision. Even then we might be surprised at how, over time, folk come to us asking for prayer and advice once they know what we are about.

And we should never lose sight of the ultimate truth; that one day Christ is going to return in all his glory (*Luke 9:26*) and whether we stand with him or cower with shame will come down to the nature of our everyday actions and words.

Integrity:

Code IV: I will not cheat in anything, personal or professional.

In *Luke 3* we read about John the Baptist preparing the way for the Kingdom. Twice he talks about cheating, once to the tax collectors and again to the soldiers:

'Tax collectors also came to be baptised. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay".'

Luke 3:12-14

Later, whilst the early church is still finding its feet, God sends a devastating cautionary message about the dangers of professing integrity whilst being full of deception. Ananias and Saphira (*Acts 5*) pay for their duplicity with their lives.

This anger isn't anything new, however. It's seen throughout the Old Testament (e.g. *Amos 8*) and even as Jesus drives out the money changers (*Luke 19:46*). So what connects all these passages?

In all cases, God was concerned with people understanding his justice, holiness and mercy. At the same time, stuff was happening that was completely muddying the waters, confusing people about what God's values really were.

When we cheat as Christians we completely discredit our ability to be a signpost to God. Yes, cheating and lying is sinful in its own right but it also makes mud where there should be clarity, and if that makes it harder for people to find Christ through us then it's incredibly sad.

How this code is played out depends on what sphere of life we find ourselves in. Usually, we know when we are about to cheat because our automatic reflex is to try to justify it. That happened in the garden of Eden, (*Genesis 3:10-13*) and nothing much has changed.

Living with integrity may not only mark us out as different, but also be good for our own health and well being. There's nothing like sleeping with a clean conscience!

**Purity without self-righteousness:
Code V: I will look away from the gutter, but be
prepared to pull people out of it.**

*'Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.'
1 Corinthians 6:18*

*"I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl".
Job 31:1*

You don't have to read much of the bible to discover that God has high ideals for sex and sexuality. It's not that God is a killjoy, but rather as a number of biblical stories give testament too, sex has the power to bring happiness as well as harm.

It seems that our sexual nature is both the most delicate and volatile aspect of who we are. If it is nurtured well, deep intimacy can be found. If it is not, the opposite can happen and we can live fractured, disconsolate lives.

David and Bathsheba, the proclivities of those in Sodom and Gomorrah, the practices of Herod which John the Baptist openly opposed, and even the people Jesus reinstated – like the woman at the well – who first had to have their sexual immorality dealt with. These are all examples of the effects of the 'gutter' on real life.

Some people use this terminology i.e. the 'gutter', to refer to other people. This is not what we are doing here. We understand clearly from scripture and our own lives that the Lord first finds us well and truly in the gutter, soaked through and through by the dirt and grime that inevitably gets washed there. No-one has cause for self-righteousness.

It is only by the hand of God that we are pulled from the gutter:

*'He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.'
Psalm 40:2*

Of course we then spend a lifetime being transformed into the likeness of Christ and learning to turn away from the gutter. Old habits sometimes die hard.

But as we grow in Christ we learn that to share his heart means also to reach out with his grace too. It is not enough to be washed clean ourselves and yet be complacent about the plight of others:

*'Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.'
Galatians 6:1-3*

Galatians 6 helpfully connects both the gentle act of grace with the absence of self-righteousness, as well as a warning not to become polluted again ourselves. The context here is firmly set within the body of believers. An evangelistic context has its own challenges. We need to recall the ministry of Jesus, who always established common ground and a respectful relationship before addressing a sin issue. Too often we go for the sin issue first, and just come across as judgmental.

In terms of long term sexual well being we also need to understand that the physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual and relational aspects of our sexuality are complex and interwoven. Christians often offer two-dimensional ministry and solutions that are wholly inadequate for seeing true health in an individual.

True, biblical, sexual well being is something we gradually live out as Christ renews us but the process will involve at least some of the following; forgiveness, therapy, dealing with addiction, confession, medication, teaching and always, always grace.

Physical Fitness

Code VI: I will keep my body fit and free from any addictions.

Too often Christians have gone down the ancient philosophical route of seeing matter (the physical) as base or bad, and the ethereal (spiritual) as higher or good. This runs counter to biblical teaching, and especially a Hebraic model of life that sees the human person as a psychosomatic whole, with our physical and immaterial being inextricably bound together.

Most GPs would agree that our thoughts and feelings can affect our physical well being, and vice. Even just not getting enough sleep can seriously affect how mental health!

The apostle Paul also had something to say about this, unsurprisingly enough:

'Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.'

1 Corinthians 6:19

The message is simple; we belong to God, in fact God is inside us, and not just in a spiritual way, but a physical way, just like God inhabits the space of a church, so look after your body!

Contemporary culture disagrees with this, seeing the body more often as a playground rather than a temple. Binge drinking and obesity are real challenges in the modern world. Staying 'fit and free' is a challenge but it's one codelife takes seriously.

David did too. He writes:

'He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze.'

Psalms 18:34

He's praising God for a strength that not only bends a metal bow (that's pretty tough!) but also for a general sense of well being and vigour that makes him feel ready as a man for anything life is going to throw at him.

This is what fitness is. It doesn't necessarily mean being able to run a marathon, but rather being able to do the best with what we were born with so that we are most

able to face life's challenges head on and give a good account of ourselves. To be brutally

honest, being four stone overweight probably isn't helpful in this regard.

Addiction is anything that we can't say no to. Being free of addiction is key, but not always easy. Usually, dealing with addiction is necessary before getting fit. It could be alcohol, or smoking, or drugs, or sex, or computer games, or food. Whatever it is, the hardest thing is to actually say, 'yes, this is a problem.' Once you can do that, you're on your way.

It's been said that losing weight is not about what you eat, but what's eating you. This is true when dealing with any addiction. Addiction often comes about because some external source of comfort is needed for an internal source of turmoil.

Confronting this, working through the turmoil, conquering addiction and moving into fitness is rarely done alone. We sometimes need a mixture of friends and professionals around us, whether it's just a bit of advice and encouragement or deeper involvement. The one thing to do is to start today, and not waste another moment of your life living as less than you were meant to be.

We know that Jesus was 'Fit and Free'. After suffering a flogging that left his back exposed to the bone, he carried a cross that would have buckled most men. Jesus is our role model here, and getting to be like him takes a lifetime. At the end of the day, that's the real race, and the real challenge:

'Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.'

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Sacrifice:

Code VII: I will put the welfare of those closest to me before my own welfare.

This flies in the face of selfishness which, if we're honest, is the default operating imperative of the average human being. Some talk of the 'Fatherless Generation', describing as such the preponderance of feckless fathers and abandoned children in today's society. Whatever we call it, when men decide to put their own pleasure before the well being of those they are responsible for, this is what happens.

Putting the welfare of those closest to you before your own welfare is something we see exemplified in the life of Jesus who not only gave his life for many on the cross, but whilst doing so took time to make sure his earthly mother would be taken care of:

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

John 19:26-27

When men acted similarly in scripture, we see that good ensued. For instance, despite the personal cost, Joseph was obedient to God and a number of times ensured the survival of his family and the safe upbringing of Jesus. Abraham gave Lot the better share of the land, though it worked out better for Abraham in the end. In ancient Egypt, the brothers of Joseph received forgiveness rather than retribution and so were able to survive the terrible drought. Boaz looked out for Ruth.

And of course there are many biblical examples where the opposite resulted in carnage. One of the saddest was the rape of Tamar by Amnon – her brother – which resulted in murder and grief, but we also see Abraham treating his wife like his sister, Eli allowing his sons to get away with extortion, and the shameful practice of men sleeping with their mother-in-laws in the New Testament.

Paul talks specifically about the role of father and husband a number of times, always counselling restraint, sacrifice and devotion. For men this can sound almost impossible when the realities of dealing with anger and impulsiveness rear their ugly head. Men are powerful; their voices are loud, their bodies are strong, their will often focussed in a single minded way. Much pain can be

wrought if these energies are unleashed unsympathetically.

It is only once we can see clearly, with God's help, just how much our own behaviour has the potential to bring pleasure or pain to those near us, that we can make the choice to live as a force for good. That choice has to be lived out daily of course, a reality that must have challenged Paul as he transformed from murderous inquisitor to compassionate evangelist.

For most men, putting our own welfare second is about laying down our lives daily for those we are responsible for. No more selfishness. No more abandonment. No more excuses; the challenge here is for men to channel their 'man power' in ways that build, encourage and protect rather than tear, discourage and destroy.

It's about conducting a thorough 'man-audit' of our lives. Asking the questions; what am I spending my money on, investing my time in, developing my relationships towards, seeing the purpose of my family as...?

If the answer to any or all of those questions is too much 'me', then something needs to change.

In *Matthew 19* the rich young ruler walks away from Jesus because he can't make the change. He could have been one of the greatest characters of scripture, but he ends up a cautionary tale because he can't live for others instead of himself.

Our kids, wives, parents, siblings, friends and colleagues are affected by our behaviour more than we realise. By putting ourselves second to them we not only demonstrate God's kind of love, we also become part of the answer in this world, rather than part of the problem.

Harmony:

Code VIII: I will treat all men and women as brothers and sisters.

In *Matthew 5* Jesus sets the standard for a new kind of human solidarity when he proclaims:

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
Matthew 5:42-44

Of course, this requires the power of God to do so. Left to our own devices, sometimes it feels almost impossible not to treat others as the enemy. The things that are done to us, from the annoying to the downright cruel, can leave us fuming.

But Jesus also sets an example for forgiving His fellow men (*Luke 23:34*) and when we start to examine the whole of scripture we see that it was never God's plan to create humankind just so that we could be at each other's throats. Jesus aims to reverse this trend, to recreate us into being peacemakers (*Matthew 5:9, James 3:18*).

The bottom line for this is a simple fact; we are all the same. We all are sinners; we all need grace; we are a part of one big family – the human family – and when two people in Christ can learn to love each other despite their reasons not to, the power and majesty of God is displayed for all to see.

The New Testament especially is replete with overtones to this end. Again and again it uses familial terms to describe the new kind of humanity we share in Christ; brother and sister, father and mother. Jesus exemplifies this truth in *Matthew 12*:

'While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."
Matthew 12:46-50

Paul goes on to underline this:

'Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.'
1 Timothy 5:1-2

True family share the same bloodline, and through Christ, the Christian family does too. Each individual is adopted into the family by the sacrifice of Jesus:

'The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.'
Romans 8:16-17

So this covers the body of believers, but why should we treat those who are still to come to faith in Christ as family members? Simply put, we should do so because the Heavenly Father's adoption plan encompasses all of humanity:

'The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.'
2 Peter 3:9

So, you could say that everyone in the world is either a brother or sister, or a potential / hopeful brother or sister. This changes everything.

For instance, apart from the one woman you may marry, or be married to, every other woman on the planet is a sister / potential sister in Christ. This kind of changes how you look at other women!

The man who cuts you up on the motorway is a brother / potential brother in Christ. The woman you might be tempted to treat harshly is actually a family member / potential family member. Ask yourself, what are your standards for treating your brother, sister, mother and father? What do you think God's standards are? How does this effect how you treat your fellow person?

This is all about seeing things from God's perspective; he doesn't want us at each other's throats. He wants us to be modelling peacemaking, brotherhood, and harmony. It's good for us, and it's good for the world.

This kind of thinking can stop soldiers using rape as a weapon in war torn nations. It can stop domestic violence. It can arrest abusive behaviour and help redirect aggressive tendencies. It can challenge the cut-throat salesman who sees each new customer as an easy mark. It can transform all of us. And that's God's plan.

Building a super-family, one transformed person at a time.

It sounds like a hugely idealistic concept. It can't possibly work. Or can it? Is it already? Treating each other as brothers and sisters may just be the most radical and subversive notion to ever hit the planet.

That's why it's one of the codes.

Team:

Code IX: I will lead as He would lead. I will honour my leaders provided this also honours Him. I will follow Him in company with my sisters and brothers.

*"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."
John 4:34*

Jesus sets a high standard for followship! We constantly see him submitting to the will of His heavenly father, most notably of course in Gethsemane, but also throughout his ministry. His sense of timing for when to reveal himself; his submitting to baptism by John (*Matthew 3:15*); his remaining on the cross when he had the power to free himself...all these and more are examples of Jesus' peerless obedience.

The key to this obedience was a sense of buying into God's master plan:

*'Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.'
Hebrews 12:2*

The joy mentioned in Hebrews derives of course from the fact that men and women are saved and a part of the eternal family. So Jesus is obedient because he trusts His Father's plan. Understanding this connection between trust and obedience is absolutely vital if we are to live in a similar way. Unfortunately, men have a tendency to trust themselves more than anyone else; it's down to needing to feel self-reliant and capable.

Men can then find it hard to be obedient to God, and especially so when obedience means honouring their earthly leaders. Many churches have suffered because of the power struggles, infighting and friendly fire that men have undertaken within them. These men are sure they know best, but they've lost sight of (or never seen in the first place) God's plan at work.

Similarly, when men have not led with grace and humility, but through brute force of personality, others have suffered, and this does not just mean in church. At it's extreme, the corrupting dominance of men has been responsible for most of the conflicts visited upon the earth.

Jesus demonstrates a stronger and higher pathway for men, whether they are leading or following.

He shows through the cross what it is like to lead by example, as well as be obedient even at great cost. By submitting to his baptism by John he demonstrates that we too must at times humble ourselves and be led or ministered to by those we might be more gifted or experienced than.

When submission and honouring go hand in hand – regardless of whether this be a church or work environment – everyone benefits:

*'Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.'
Hebrews 13:17*

Of course, when something is being done that clearly goes against God, we should do something about it and not stand idly by. The book of Daniel is replete with examples of this. But we must be careful not to justify our own private rebellion with some righteous sounding talk.

Finally, this code asserts the need to not let our faith find itself in isolation. Sometimes it's when we feel least like meeting with God's people that it's exactly the time to be doing so:

*'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.'
Hebrews 10:25*

This is really important for men to sign up to. There's a technical term for what happens to men when they feel fed up and unappreciated; it's called 'sulking'. Sulking men isolate themselves, and do no good for themselves or anyone else around them.

Codelife men rise above this and remember the example Jesus sets - whether it be in leading or following – and so resist the urge to tyrannise or rebel, instead focussing on God's great plan being worked out in both their own lives and the lives of those around them.

Justice:

Code X: I will use my strength to protect the weak and stand against the abuse of power.

The abuse of power occurs when a position from which leverage is possible is used to cause net suffering amongst individuals or groups of people. In other words - tyranny.

Tyranny is all around us. Yes, it is on the news in the form of dictatorships but it's also closer to home, whether it be the office manager who rules through fear and intimidation, or the school bully who uses violence against those who are weaker. Some might say it's just a 'dog eat dog world' and tell us to 'get on with it'. Well, this isn't God's view.

God told his people to set up cities of refuge so that the falsely accused would have somewhere safe to go (*Numbers 35*). The Bible clearly labels those kings who were tyrannical (with the catchphrase 'did evil in the eyes of the Lord'; see *1 Kings 15-16* for examples - to mark God's disapproval). The greatest mass protest against tyranny in the history of the world came when God led Israel out of Egypt after hearing of their suffering under the slave masters (*Exodus 3:7*). David is harshly rebuked when he abuses his position of power to dispose of his love rival Uriah (*2 Samuel 12*). Jesus famously drives out the money lenders from the temple because they are extorting funds from those who are helpless to do anything about it (*John 2*). The list goes on.

And then there are the moments when God's people get it right; the times when they use their strength to protect others. Esther in her role as queen (*Esther 4:14*); Nehemiah in his role as cup bearer, deeply concerned for his own people (*Nehemiah 1-2*); Paul arguing for the reinstatement of Onesimus (*Philemon*); David giving shelter to Mephibosheth (*2 Samuel 9*).

John the Baptist had to address the abuse of power in his time, and we see two particular cases - tax collectors and soldiers extorting money - being addressed directly:

Tax collectors also came to be baptised. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

"Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

Luke 3:12-14

The heart of the message comes from God's own heart; He is a protector of the weak himself. He lifts up, protects, and shelters those who call to Him. David knows this and calls God a shepherd - Jehovah Rohi - in *Psalms 23*, one of the most tender and intimate titles given to God. The whole Psalm, so well known as it is, reflects the protecting, nurturing nature of a good shepherd, who use his 'Rod and Staff' to comfort, which of course also implies protection, just in the way a middle eastern shepherd would have used his staff not only to guide the sheep, but protect them from predators.

Men are naturally strong. Not all men are stronger than all women, but generally speaking men's voices are louder and deeper, their stamina longer, their muscle mass greater, and their physical strength higher than that of women. How are we meant to discharge this power?

If God is our example, then gently and controlled is the answer. He is the creator of the universe, omnipotent and supreme, yet he stays his wrath at sin that people in their own time will find their way to Him (*Romans 9:22-23*). God is slow to anger, abounding in love, using His strength to protect the weak.

Jesus is the ultimate example of this. He humbles himself on the cross, discharging all his power to break the tyranny of sin and Satan. Because of his sacrifice we are saved and set free! He didn't stand back and say, 'serves them right', and he resisted Satan's temptation to become a tyrant himself when offered rulership of the earth (*Matthew 4:8-9*).

At work, school and home we are subtly offered moments of tyranny. It's so easy to slip into being a bully, to use our power and strength for personal gain, but the example Jesus sets is one where power is used to stand against tyranny and lift up the weak. The bible shows that when this happens, blessing breaks out in all kinds of wonderful ways. When it doesn't, only pain ensues, and often for the tyrant too.

Sometimes the stand we need to take is momentary, at other times it will have to be drawn out as we see systemic abuse occurring around us. However and whenever we do take our stand, this code is essential for challenging the evil around us and within us as men.

With God's help, we can be a force for good in the world.

Stewardship:

Code XI: I will protect the world that God has made.

Let's be frank; the bible doesn't directly address issues of conservation. The world was very different when the scriptures were written and humankind didn't then possess the power, like we do now, to permanently damage the environment through the excessive or improper use of technology. However, what we do find in the bible are general principles that inform and instruct us today about how to conduct ourselves. These principles powerfully bind us to the task of godly stewardship and certainly don't allow the kind of feckless attitude to the Earth that some Christians adopt, just because they think God will burn it up one day anyway. That's as bad as saying murder is ok if you think someone is already going to hell. Definitely not what Jesus would do...

In *Genesis 1* the creation account is very clear about both the responsibilities and values humankind is to have toward creation:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Genesis 1:26

So yes, humanity is charged with overseeing all the creatures God has made, but this is to be done out of being in God's image i.e. reflecting his likeness in all we do and are. We know elsewhere from scripture that God is concerned for the welfare of the animals:

'For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine.'

Psalms 50:10-11

"But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

Jonah 4:11

"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

Matthew 6:26

There is a sense here of concern and provision by God for creation. If we are to reflect His values, then we have to resist the exploitative or callous approaches to nature that have been especially prevalent in the last few centuries.

Where animals, plant life, ecosystems and the global environment are put secondary to the economic forces of industrialisation humanity has not only lost the plot (by ruining its home) but also lost sight of who God is and what He has asked us to do.

Counting the human cost, concern for the environment is also a justice issue (something also close to God's heart; *Leviticus 19:15, Psalm 11:7, Amos 5:14, 24, Zechariah 7:9*).

Often it is the poor who suffer the most when the environment is damaged. Deforestation, flooding, chemical spillages and pollution have all accounted for deaths in poorer nations, as well as terrible living conditions.

Protecting the world that God has made is something for each of us to work out in the places and professions we find ourselves. The charge God gave to Adam and Eve was pre-fall and so it is the sinful nature that most contributes to the exploitation of the world around us. Sometimes our stand may have to be largely prophetic in that we don't seem to have much power to effect change, but we speak out anyway. Jeremiah was once such a biblical figure.

At other times we may be able to make an actual difference. Whatever we do, our message, through word and action, needs to be the same as Jesus' when he cryptically said:

***"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's
and to God what is God's."***

Mark 12:17

Basically, it's God's world, and don't you forget it.

Forgiveness and restoration:

Code XII: If I fail I will not give up. He never gives up on me.

Failure can feel like a terrible thing to men. There aren't many who can't identify with how Peter must have felt when he heard the cock crow after his three denials of Christ. During the last supper just a few hours earlier there had been so much bravado, so much promise. Everyone had heard the confident declaration that Peter's support of Jesus was total and unwavering. Never has anyone been more wrong.

How good it is to then read about the reinstatement of Peter in *John 21*, and even further, to understand that this is actually the discipleship road we all travel. When we experience the love of God, whether it is during a quiet moment or a worship event, we can feel like our commitment is unassailable. And then, at some point, inevitably it seems, we falter. Thank God for forgiveness!

Scripture is very clear about God's forgiveness; it's reliable, complete, permanent and received after sincere repentance:

'If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

1 John 1:9

When it comes to living out The Code, understanding and applying this is absolutely crucial. Otherwise, The Code would be just another legalistic enterprise that ended up tying people in knots of failure. The Christian life is aspirational i.e. it calls us to look upward, to Christ, and seek to imitate Him. When we fail, we remember there is ***'no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus'***. *Romans 8:1*

Forgiveness and restoration lead to us leaving behind the old sin habits as gradually we become transformed into the likeness of Christ:

'And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.'

2 Corinthians 3:18

We can also be certain that this process, as difficult and even slow as it feels sometimes, will find its conclusion one day in our lives:

'being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.'

Philippians 1:6

It's plain to see then that God doesn't give up on us, even when we feel like he should. Men especially can feel that if they can't be great at something, they won't try it at all. No man wants to feel mediocre!

Satan can play on this, accusing us of failure (*Revelation 12:10*) and tempting us to quit. It may be that we end up feeling that The Code and in turn biblical living is too difficult or too demanding. What we need to realise is that it is too hard. Of course it is; the goal is perfection!

Like climbing a mountain, where the summit represents the journey's end, perfection is achieved through micro stages, or mini ascents of sanctification where God wipes out the corruption of sin. We see this happening ever so starkly in Zacchaeus when he decides to stop cheating people out of money (*Luke 19*). One moment he is a swindler; the next, after an encounter with Jesus, he has a hunger for justice. In us sometimes sin is dealt with like this – instantaneously – but often it is dealt with over time, and victory is hard fought. We may actually end this life still fighting some lifelong battles.

That's ok. So do all of God's people.

We need to constantly look at ourselves through the vision Jesus has of us, as men who will shine like the sun (*Philippians 2:15*). Jesus figured we were worth dying for, worth saving, worth working with, worth having around forever. The final Code reminds us of this, and so inspires us to never give up or back down, but stand strong in God's love, forgiveness and ultimate plan for our lives.

As a song once said, ***"I get knocked down, but I get up again, 'cause nothing's gonna keep me down"***

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