

A Masculine Meltdown of Historic Proportions

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"Evil effects inevitably arise when we deviate from God's pattern... Because of the close relation between family and church, godly family life stimulates appreciation of God as our Heavenly Father, and appreciation of God stimulates godly family life. Both are enhanced by the example of mature, fatherly leaders within the church. Conversely, disintegration of household order within the church adversely affects both our consciousness of being in God's family and the quality of love within Christian families". Vern Sheridan Poythress, *The Church as Family*, p30

And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart' and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up".

- Deut 6:6-9

A meltdown has occurred, as the modern church has rejected God's order for the family and the church. This defeat has unleashed many devastating effects, including the perpetuation of a very embarrassing situation for men: P.M.S. It stands for Passive Male Syndrome. It is as old as Adam, and it is cutting off the church's long term prospects for vitality.

Robert Lewis has said that we have experienced "a masculine meltdown of historic proportions."

There is nowhere that the meltdown is so vividly illustrated as in the schedule of the average church, and in the behavior of the average father in his home and his local church.

The scriptures are perfectly clear: children should be trained in spiritual matters primarily by their fathers. The father is one of the most important aspects of the delivery system for the news of the kingdom of God, and when you bypass him, you reject the Biblical order for the church and the home.

The church has followed the world system and has nearly obliterated the scriptural role of the head of the household in church life. This has paralleled what the world has done in the broader culture. Unwittingly, the church has taken over the fathers role and given it to preachers, women, Sunday school teachers, and childcare workers.

Look at where the bulk of the energy of human resource is directed in the average church. Massive amounts of energy are plunged into things that secure short term attendance

bumps by making low entry level slots for people to be involved, but neglect the long term activity and energy investment that secures a future for many generations.

Many of our popular Church programs for children inflame PMS and make it normal for the average man to drive the shuttle bus to the meetings without personally performing his duty as pastor, teacher and theologian for his children.

I once heard someone say that in the church, "we drop our children off in kindergarten and pick them up again in twelfth grade and wonder what happened to them." This condition oozes with PMS. It is produced by a culture that eliminates the father's role that is so clearly detailed in scripture.

How has modern church structure worked to facilitate PMS? To answer the question I would like to briefly profile church structure prescribed by the apostles as well as a dominant theme of the Old Testament regarding the training of children.

Church Structure in the New Testament

In the New Testament, we find a surprisingly simple approach to ministry. It happens mainly in homes, public squares and sometimes in the synagogues. It is also striking that there are only a few specific equipping structures mentioned. If we only had the Bible to guide us in church form and structure, we would find a startling simplicity. If we select from the equipping structures mentioned in the Bible there are a only few from which to choose. Quite simply, the church met for the apostles teaching, breaking of bread, prayer, and evangelism.

Ministry to children

The Bible never talks about specific ministry structure for children. The testimony of the entire Old Testament gives the task to fathers. It is vividly summarized in Deut 6:1-4. .

In the early church it is obvious that the children were together with the adults in the meetings. For example, when Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesian and the Colossian churches, he was assuming that children would be present in the meeting when the letter was read. He addressed them directly in a natural way. This indicates that children were not sent to an age graded Sunday school system for teaching. This makes perfect sense in view of the refreshing stories of Jesus teaching children, while adults want to banish them.

In short, if we look at only what we find in the Bible, then we would conclude that children are to be taught by their fathers and through the regular meetings of the church. And, when the father is absent as in the case of Timothy and Samuel, God provides another source.

Absent from the New Testament are forms like Sunday School, youth ministry, and childcare. They are simply not described, prescribed or subscribed by the Apostles for the equipping of the saints.

Sunday Schools ARE Part of the Problem

Until the last year and a half, I have always been in churches where Sunday School was the normal fare for training of children. I have been a Sunday School teacher from adult to toddler, and I am thankful for the relationships built and sweetness that I experienced in those roles. There was fruit. It was a blessing.

But something was obvious in all of these churches. The men (and I always have made it a practice to know the men) did very little personal instruction of their children. And, even when the Sunday School teacher tried to get the parents involved, it rarely happened. This is normal in our churches, but I think we need to realize that this condition causes a heinous crime to be committed against God's order for the church and the family. God never intended for children to be trained by Sunday school teachers. He specifically gave this responsibility to fathers.

Fortunately, though, God is able to raise up disciples in spite of our disobedience. God can raise up a true disciple out of a severely dysfunctional home and a dysfunctional church. I have seen many examples of this. John the Baptist asserted that it is not lineage that matters most, since "God is able to raise up children to Abraham from stones". (Matt 3:8).

Since we have eliminated Sunday school from the program of our church at Hope Baptist, I must say that fathers ARE taking on this role, like never before. Almost universally, our men report that they are having a personal revival as a result. They are reading the Bible to their children. They are more evangelistic. They are reading the Bible themselves more than ever. They are leading more than they ever have. They report that they are growing closer in their devotion to God than ever.

Let me make a bold proposition from my experience: in churches where you have Sunday schools, you find the majority of men neglecting their teaching role. My experience indicates that in the churches where you do not have Sunday schools, and men are encouraged to be the teachers of the Bible, you find the majority of men taking action.

And, the identity of who does the teaching is of critical importance.

The Importance of the Teacher

Who will be the teachers is something that Jesus was concerned about. Jesus observed:

"A student, when he is fully trained, will be like his teacher." Luke 6:40.

Throughout scripture, the importance of the teacher is understood. The primary responsibility for the teaching of children is a father. Other means of teaching, even though they can be valuable contributors, are not clearly stated.

A man will pursue an improving golf score, even though it is hard and reveals his inadequacy, but when he is challenged in his knowledge of the Bible, he shrinks away and gives up.

Men in our churches are passive toward their creation order responsibilities, but passionate toward their hobbies.

At our church, we are attempting to focus the whole congregation around the scripture teaching on Sunday morning. This is how we will train the people in scripture. Our people read the passages for study during the week, and our gifted men explain them on Sunday through the preaching of the Word.

At the same time, we will not bypass the head of the household to fulfill the role of teaching.

Recently I heard someone say that men are "passive in almost every area except two: their favorite hobbies and their sex lives."

They bungee jump, play golf and coach soccer teams. They work on committees, teach Sunday school, play music, preach and engage in all kinds of church related activities. They will drive from baseball field to baseball field to see their children play – even on Sundays. But, they do not pray with their families. They do not have a systematic plan to teach their children the Word of God. They nourish every organization but their own household organization. They are like "Proverbial Bob" who fills the cup of his life with meetings and sports and TV and starves himself and everyone around him of the Word of God. He is a trivial man, energized by trivia and spending his energy on trivia.

Energy Shift

My message to men is: "Shift your energy focus to the areas of critical importance in the Kingdom of God." If you are neglecting your number one leadership responsibility because of golf, soccer, work, stress, church obligations... then you need to realize that your energies are misplaced. Repentance is required for taking so lightly His charge to you as a man.

Men need to shift the focus of their energies to the priorities of God and His eternal kingdom.

Men need to plan to fail in a few hobbies, so that they will win in the really important things.

What About Fathers Who Neglect Their God Given Role?

When a father is disobedient in fulfilling this role, he is exposed to the leaders of the church and should become the target of ministry and prayer so that he fulfills his responsibility. This should lead either to his salvation or his faithfulness.

But who will teach the children with unbelieving or absent fathers?

The way I understand the history of the church, Sunday schools were created (in the 19th century) to meet a social need – illiteracy. Someone once said that "no self respecting father would send his children to these meetings, because he understood it was his job." They were created to teach the fatherless and street children how to read. This form evolved into the modern Sunday school. It grew out of an obvious need in society to rescue street children from poverty and ignorance.

There should be ways in the church to teach these children God's Word. Fatherless children, children with passive or absent fathers should receive the benefit from the larger family of God. But, how is this to be handled?

The answer from scripture is that fathers should take care of the fatherless (see Psalm 58:5).

If we re-establish the order and authority in the church and the home, we will reap huge spiritual dividends in the coming generations. The fruit will multiply exponentially if we take God seriously in the order established by the apostles. Unfortunately, popular church structure often works against far reaching widespread evangelism, the ministry of the Word, worship, and the transmission of the gospel from one generation to the next.

It is time to raise up a new generation of men who will not be melted down. We need to wage war against PMS in our churches. We need to call men to depart from some of our modern practices and replace them with the historic practices and priorities of the church.