

The Vocation of Man in the Church and Home

The Second Great Awakening during the early 19th century in the United States was a Protestant religious revival which gained momentum by 1800. By its peak in the 1840's, it was a movement characterized by enthusiasm, emotion, and an appeal to the supernatural as it sought to reject the rationalism and deism of the Enlightenment. These "Romantic" religious movements were also sweeping across Europe at the time, especially throughout England, Scotland, and Germany. In Germany, the movement is more reflective of Philipp Spener's Pietism, whose emphasis was on a personal spiritual transformation through individual devotion and piety. A mixture of Lutheran and Reformed theology it helped, along with the revivalists, form the more recent basis for evangelicalism today. In the United States, it was the revivalist nature of these religious gatherings, because of its emotional appeal, that reached more women than men, especially younger women. Nancy Pearcy notes in her book, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, that "Here women were permitted to pray and speak publically and even to become 'exhorters' (teaching assistants), which scandalized critics. Moreover, because the revivalists

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stressed the emotional side of religion, their women being more naturally religious than men, and urged wives to be the means of converting their more worldly husbands."¹ In his seminal book, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity*, Leon Podles, refers back to the High Middle Ages that the gender imbalance (more women than men in church) became noticeable.² Jon Butler in referring to the First Great Awakening notes that "Women made up the majority of members in most New England established churches in the 1680's. By the 1720's women dominated membership in virtually all known New England Churches."³ While this trend in the US has leveled off in more recent times, one can observe that the great majority of Christian churches in the West have an imbalance in the ratio of men and women participants. Noting that millions of married women worship alone every Sunday has prompted people like David Murrow to write a bestselling book, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*,⁴ and his follow-up book, *How Women Help Men Find God*.⁵

While the observable retreat of men was occurring in the estate of the Church, the *Ecclesia*, also a retreat from the participation of husbands and fathers in the estate of the Home, or the *oeconomia*, was also occurring. History can note that the "key turning point was the Industrial Revolution.....It was the Industrial Revolution which eventually divided the private realm of family and faith from the public realm of business and industry."⁶ Life before this period (early 19th century) saw families living the agrarian lifestyle on farms and in peasant villages. Work was done in the home by families. The economic unit was the household which could include extended family members, servants, and hired hands. Stores offices, and workshops were located often downstairs with the living quarters upstairs. Husband and wife worked together all day (the word "husband" means "house bound"). Children also worked alongside their parents. If indeed they went to school, they would be let out at noon so they could come home and help with the family enterprise. This meant that husbands and fathers were active in the home, often feeling quite at home in the kitchen, mothers and wives learned useful skills and trades from working with their husbands. As a part of marriage the wife was seen as the co-worker alongside her husband. It also meant that fathers were much more involved in raising their children than they are today. With production centered on the family hearth, fathers were a visible presence, year after year, day after day. Nancy Pearcy relates, "Historical records reveal that colonial literature on parenting – like sermons and child-rearing manuals – where not addressed to mothers, as the majority are today. Instead, they were typically addressed to fathers. Fathers were considered the primary parent, and were held to be particularly important in their children's religious and intellectual training."⁷

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Each household, or economic unit, was a small commonwealth, headed by the *Hausvater* ("house father"). Here the father spent time with his family, daily, and in large quantities. Training them in work

and trade, eating together, praying together. In terms of the father's constant presence in the home, nineteenth-century America was closer to the world of Martin Luther than to our own. "When a father washes diapers and performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool," Luther wrote, "he should remember that God with all his angels and creatures is smiling."⁸ However, and most importantly, "fathers assumedthe most important parental task: the religious and moral education of the young. As a result, societal praise or blame for a child's outcome was customarily bestowed not (as it is today) on the mother but on the father."⁹ All this means is that the Industrial Revolution has taken the father out of the home and has drastically altered the roles of both men and women. The man's place of work moved from the home to the factory. Industrial work became shockingly different from the older family-centered work culture. Fatherhood in our society has spent a long time shrinking. The physical separation from the home to work has caused fathers over the last two hundred years to gradually move from the center to the periphery of family life. Today, the father has almost completely ceased to be portrayed as the essential guarantor of child, societal, and religious well-being. This has been a downhill spiral for fathers since the Industrial Revolution.

The major change as a result has been a feminization of the domestic sphere. There became a radical change regarding men's and women's roles within the home. Gender identity and family life were re-defined, especially as it focused on childhood as a growing and separate category which focused on the earlier years of life as the distinct realm of women in nurture and care, in contrast to the outside world which was dominated by men. A very important consequence of these new ideas was the relative decline of patriarchy and the shift toward a more companionate model of marriage and parenthood. The historian Carl Degler, describing "the increasingly 'attenuated character' of nineteenth century patriarchy, concludes that 'the companionate marriage placed limits on the power of the husband' and led to the 'relatively democratic role of the father in the nineteenth century father.'"¹⁰

From a modern perspective, this emerging ethos of the so-called "companionate" family, is noteworthy. Can our society return to the model of the agrarian patriarchal father? No. Nor should our society try to recreate this model. However, both the new economy and new philosophy of the nineteenth century contributed to the sharp contraction of fatherhood as a social role. Stephen M. Frank summarizes the impact of these basis shifts: "As some fathers began to spend more time at work and less at home, and as family structure shifted away from patriarchal dominance and toward more companionate relationships, paternal requirements shrank."¹¹ As two other authors put it:

The transition from the father to the mother as the primary socializer and educator of young children was completed by the nineteenth century. The mother was now regarded as the "natural" caretaker of the child, and the father's role was limited in practice to that of a supervisor or the ultimate dispenser of discipline in the home.¹²

From the end of the nineteenth century, fathers have begun the long march from the center to the periphery of family life. Mothers took on greater roles, child-rearing manuals were more addressed to mothers than fathers. "In cases of family dissolution, custody of children shifted decisively from fathers to mothers during this period."¹³

By the beginning of the twentieth century, we see that the key to the definition of manliness changed from the domestic realm to the politics of self-interest. The key term was "self" as in the "self-made" man. No longer was there civic virtue in the fact that man denied self for the common good, now was the emergence of no common good as men were set free to pursue self-interest. The image of this new stunted version of masculinity was tough, pragmatic, competitive, and morally insensitive. Now men needed to learn virtues from their wives because men were "free" to deny their own moral and spiritual aspirations. Now men needed to learn virtues from their wives as women became morally superior now holding men accountable for their actions and behavior.

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What was happening in the Christian church at this time? How did it react to the "demoralization" of the male character? The American church acquiesced in the redefinition of masculinity. The church (like it did during the first time "Bridal Mysticism" was introduced in the eleventh century)¹⁴ begin to pitch its appeal to women. In many evangelical churches women began to outnumber men by a ratio of two to

one. In short, Christianity became “feminized” as it not only appealed more to women but became an emotional enterprise, faith was being transferred to the private sphere of experience and feelings.

Ann Douglas writes in a classic book, *The Feminization of American Culture* that the ministry lost “a toughness, a sternness, an intellectual rigor which our society then and since has been accustomed to identify with ‘masculinity.’” And instead it acquired the “feminine” traits of care, nurturing, sentimentalism, and retreat from the harsh, competitive ethos of the public arena.”¹⁵ One Congregationalist minister complained “the sword of the spirit” has been “muffled up and decked out with flowers and ribbons.”¹⁶ In the early nineteenth century, one church leader wrote,

I believe that if Christianity should be compelled to flee from the mansions of the great, the academies of the philosophers, the halls of legislators, or the throng of

with women at the fireside; her last altar would be the female heart.¹⁷

As Nancy Percy notes, “The operative word here is ‘flee.’ There is a presumption that religion was on the run from the public realm of hard-headed men, retreating to the private realm of soft-hearted women. In short, instead of challenging the growing secularism among men, the church largely acquiesced – by turning to women.”¹⁸ One result was that mothers increasingly took over the formally paternal task of conducting family prayers.¹⁹ The churches were basically releasing men from the responsibility of being religious leaders.

Jettison ahead to the 1920’s and 30’s, for the first time, it became socially acceptable for fathers not to be involved with their families in urban America. Nancy Percy again writes, “the father had become a secondary parent who covered the ‘extras’: hobbies, sports, trips to the zoo...or as one historian describes it, fathers were reduced to entertainers – Romper Room dads.”²⁰ Percy goes on to state, “From 1960 to 1980 there was a striking 43 percent reduction in the amount of time men spent in a family environment where young children are present.”²¹

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I have observed as a pastor serving four different congregations in Canada and the United States these last 27 years that men have abandoned their posts in both church and home. In talking with brother pastors, the frustrations experienced together in the ministry are seen in various ways in congregational and home life:

- 1) the male to female ratio in worship still reflects a decades long 60 to 40 ratio of women to men;
- 2) the lack of men in attendance in Bible study;
- 3) the difficulty of finding spiritually mature men to serve on boards of elders or deacons and finding men to teach Sunday School;
- 4) the difficulty in finding fathers to lead family devotions or to work with their sons and daughters with their Confirmation homework;
- 5) the fact that some voter’s assembly meetings may be dominated by women;
- 6) finding many female board chairs, e.g. Evangelism, Education, and Stewardship;
- 7) having women lectors, and;
- 8) the fact that the great majority of the time it is the women who bring their marriage and family problems to their pastor.

In my own ministries, the fact that it was over 90% of the wives who initiated divorce proceedings rather than their husbands, and the many husbands who refused counseling to heal their marriages. The fact that many women spent many hours a week at church away from husband and family supposedly, I have assumed, looking for spiritual fulfillment in their lives. As professor at the seminary it is not hard to notice the difficulty it is today to recruit qualified men for the Office of the Holy ministry. (There are many factors involved in this of course, one being demographics, but it is also telling that the majority of sons raised in the parsonage today no longer follow in their father’s footsteps like it used to be decades ago.) The increasing difficulty that many men in the church have with pornography addiction, substance abuse, and

violent behavior. Finally, the too high percentage of pastors who leave the ministry (in my class, Fort Wayne, 1990, around 35%) before their 20th year. I don't call all of this a conundrum, I call it a crisis not only in spiritual leadership, but also in a Biblical understanding of masculinity, manhood, fraternity, patriarchy, headship, and, yes, leadership understood in a proper Biblical sense.

One way to deal with this in the parish was to take intentional time with men either individually or in groups to teach and mentor. One thing that was proven to have a positive effect in the congregations I served, and subsequently the family, was the Saturday morning breakfast and Bible study for men and their sons lead by the pastor. What slowly evolved from the time of the Second Awakening has come full flourish in the early part of the 21st century. All is not lost however, there have been signs in recent years where fathers are spending more time in the home and with their children. This past summer, an article was written entitled, "Dads now spend three times as much time with their kids as previous generations."²² Of course, what amount of time that Dads spend with their children teaching and modeling the faith to their own offspring continues to be the main issue in Christian homes.

Even well before the time of the Second Awakening in America, it was Martin Luther who addressed this issue in his day and time. In the context of teaching and catechesis, Luther addressed both the Large and Small catechisms to pastors, but he still envisioned the head of the household as the primary teacher. Charles Arand goes on to describe this when in 1529 each of the then five chief parts on large sheets of paper bore the title, "How the House Father Should present the Ten Commandments [or Creed, etc.] to the members of the household."²³ Of course, "household" here meant husband, wife, children, extended family, as well as servants or domestics and other dependents. Luther seems to assume that the "head of the household" was somewhat literate. Arand goes on to state that:

Luther's focus on the family was not new. He simply took over the concept of domestic catechization from the Middle Ages and before that from the ancient church. Within the history of the church families had always been considered an important setting for catechizing the young in the faith.... Throughout the Middle Ages, the church frequently singled out parents for admonition and exhortation to instruct their children.²⁴

During the 16th century therefore, it has been known that Luther gave the father an emphasis and value that had not been communicated before. The father became the "pastor" of the house. Where the father (or mother for that matter) were ill-equipped to carry out their divinely ordained task he provided them with assistance to do so. He wrote his explanations to the catechism aimed at the adults so they could teach these truths to their children. Arand states, "This comes through particularly in the first person perspective of the housefather from which much of the catechism is written. For example, in the First Article the housefather speaks of 'wife and children' as gifts from God."²⁵

What does the Bible say about man's vocation in the church and home? In an article entitled "The Church as Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in the Church,"²⁶ the author begins with the important premise that we are to call God "our Father" (Matt. 6:9). We who are redeemed by Jesus Christ are children of God (Galatians 4:1-7). These two Biblical affirmations are among many in which the Bible employs an analogy between a human family and the church. By means of this family analogy God makes some of His most precious promises to us concerning His present love, our future inheritance, and our intimate fellowship with Him (for example, Romans 8:12-17; Hebrews 12:5-11; Revelation 21:7).

The practical implications of these "family teachings" are so deep and so many-sided that we can never fully fathom them. Here the author of this article concentrates only on one strand of implications, those for our conduct toward one another within the Christian community. The main thesis is that the Bible invites us to use these family teachings to draw some particular inferences about the respective roles of men and women within the church. In brief, the argument runs as follows: Just as husbands and fathers ought to exercise godly leadership in their human families, so wise, mature men ought to be appointed as fatherly leaders in the church (1 Timothy 3:1-7). A particularly important role also belongs to more mature women (1 Timothy 5:9-16; Titus 2:3-5). Likewise mothers of the church, they are to train their spiritual daughters by example and word. But just as in the case of marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33), the respective functions of men and women are not reversible in all respects. Men—and not women—are called on to exercise the decisive fatherly leadership as elders.

The confession that God is our Father belongs to a most fundamental strand of New Testament teaching, beginning with Jesus' model prayer in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9) and continuing

through the many instances where God is called “God the Father.” The Bible never simply means that God is the Creator of all human beings. Having God as Father implies having intimate family fellowship with Him (Romans 8:14-17) and reflecting His holy character (1 Peter 1:14-17). Christ the only Son of God has God as His Father in a unique sense. In addition to Him, only Christians, that is, those who have received the Spirit of Christ, are rightly able to cry, “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). Those outside of Christ have the devil as their father and want to carry out their father’s desires (John 8:44; cf. 1 John 5:19).²⁷ Thus as Poythress summarizes:

Thus, Christians are called “sons of God” and “children of God,” in pointed contrast to non-Christians, who are outside God’s family (1 John 5:1-5). To be called a child of God has many implications. We have intimate fellowship with God the Father (Romans 8:15). Jesus Christ is our elder brother (Romans 8:29). We are legally adopted out of a situation of bondage (Galatians 4:1-7). We are no longer slaves (Galatians 4:7; Romans 8:15). We are to receive the full inheritance from God as co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). We are conformed to the pattern of death and resurrection life established through Christ (Romans 8:11-13). We share in the common family Spirit, the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14-15). We are remade in God’s image (Romans 8:29). We are born from God (1 John 5:4; John 1:12-13). As obedient children, we are to imitate the good character of our Father (Ephesians 5:1; 1 Peter 1:14-17).²⁸

Because God is our Father in this intimate sense, and because Jesus Christ is our brother and our all-sufficient advocate to the Father, we do not need any other human intermediary to bring us into contact with God. In relation to God the Father, we are brothers to all other Christians. We are to be servants to one another, and no one of us is to lord it over the others (Mark 10:42-45). Hence Jesus specifically criticizes the use of honorific titles that might contradict our status as children and undermine our sense of intimacy with God: “But you are not to be called “Rabbi,” for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth “father,” for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called “teacher,” for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:8-12)

As the author states, “Jesus’ own emphasis on humility and service and the larger context of Matthew 23, where Jesus is criticizing the Pharisees, indicate that Jesus is not setting forth a legalistic rule about the mere verbal use of the words “father” and “teacher.” Rather, He is criticizing an attitude of the heart. We must always recognize the fundamental character of Christian brotherhood. Our common status as brothers implies that we should submit to Christ and serve one another.”²⁹

In fact, then, Jesus’ teaching is complementary to other teachings in the New Testament epistles that do assign a special role to pastors and teachers (for example, Ephesians 4:11). The most fundamental relationship is the Father-Son relationship between God and Christian believers. But God’s fatherly care ought to be reflected in the care Christians exercise towards one another within the church. For example, Christ is our Teacher in a most exalted sense (Matthew 23:10; John 13:13-14). From the fullness of His wisdom and His teaching gifts, He has distributed gifts to the church and thereby makes some people into subordinate or assistant teachers (Ephesians 4:7, 11). Christ is our Shepherd in a unique sense (John 10:11-18). He also imparts gifts to human beings who then become under-shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-4). God the Father and Christ are the ultimate models we ought to imitate (1 Peter 1:14-15; Romans 8:29). But in a subordinate sense we are supposed to imitate the good examples set by more mature believers (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:4, 7).³⁰

The theme of family relationships is particularly prominent in Paul’s First Letter to Timothy. Paul repeatedly invokes the analogy of a family in order to enable Timothy better to understand the appropriate order and responsibilities within the Christian church. Paul calls Timothy his “son,” expressing both his affection and the discipling relationship between them (1 Timothy 1:2, 18). He advises Timothy to treat an older man “as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters” (1 Timothy 5:1-2). If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should look after her (1 Timothy 5:4). But if the immediate family is lacking, the larger Christian family should care for her (1 Timothy 5:5, 16).

The overseers or elders ought to be respectable family men: “Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage

his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)” (1 Timothy 3:2-5)

The requirement concerning “managing his own family well” is particularly important, because the same wisdom and skills necessary for good family management apply also to the management of God's church.

Finally, the Apostle Paul explicitly indicates the prominent role of the family theme in 1 Timothy 3:14-15: “Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.”

In fact, these verses summarize the thrust of the whole letter. The phrase “these instructions” is most naturally understood as referring to the contents of the letter as a whole. Thus the letter as a whole has the purpose of indicating “how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household.”

The reference to “God's household” could theoretically involve either of two ideas, namely, the idea of communion with God in the “house” or “temple” of God, or the idea of a household managed by God. In some contexts within the Bible, the idea of God dwelling among His people as in a temple is emphasized (1 Corinthians 3:10-17). But in the context of 1 Timothy, the idea of household order and arrangements is obviously the most prominent. The order of the church is analogous to the order of a human household. Members of the church are to treat one another as they would members of their own family (1 Timothy 5:1-2). They are to care for one another in need (1 Timothy 5:5, 16). The overseers are to be men skillful at managing the household of God, as demonstrated by their earlier skill with their own immediate families (1 Timothy 3:1-7). Note: Paul is not restricting the office of pastor to married men alone. This restriction wouldn't even come to mind except that the passages seem to be teaching it. But a closer look shows that such an approach leads to unhealthy, even absurd conclusions. For example, it would eliminate Jesus, Paul, and (it seems) Timothy from the office of elder. It would also negate the powerful case the Apostle Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 7 for the benefits singleness brings to ministry. Paul celebrates single servants as being “free from concern” and able to focus completely on how they may please and serve the Lord, living in undivided devotion (1 Cor. 7:32, 35). However, it has been assumed among the apostles that many were married. We know for certain that Peter was married because he had a mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14). The apostle Paul, who was not married, asked the Corinthians whether he also did not have the right to take a believing wife (1 Corinthians 9:5), as did “the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas [Peter].” From this, we can assume that Peter was not the only one to have a wife.

The author goes on to state, “In 1 Timothy the fundamental household analogy is not merely confined to one or two incidental illustrations or colorful flourishes of rhetoric. Rather, it is used as a basis for arguments and inferences concerning Christian responsibilities.”³¹ The central role of the analogy is particularly clear in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, which concludes with the sobering question, “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?” Paul in effect presents an argument: good family leadership must be one of the criteria for appointment to a position of overseer because the very same skills and competencies are required for overseeing “one's own house” and the Christian “house.” Paul does not expect Timothy simply to take Paul's word for the fact that such-and-such a criterion is suitable for elders. He expects Timothy to see the wisdom—yes, the inevitability—of this criterion on the basis of the validity of the analogy. Indirectly, Timothy is presumably even being invited to use the same argument himself, if someone else should have doubts about the matter.

Similarly, in 1 Timothy 5:1-2 we can see the beginnings of an argument. “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.” The key comparative word “as” might possibly be interpreted as introducing mere illustrations. But all the illustrations are of exactly the same type, in that they all use the analogy between church and family. In view of the general statement about conduct in “God's household” in 1 Timothy 3:14-15, the comparisons in 5:1-2 are to be seen as so many ways of fleshing out the implications of being a member of God's household. We can perceive the obligatory nature of the inferences. You must treat the older men like fathers, the younger men like brothers, etc., not only because in some very general sense you must love them, but because you are part of the very same spiritual household. Conduct toward any other member of the household must take into account not merely sweepingly general obligations to love but the concrete distinctions introduced by

differences in status within the household: treating some like fathers, others like brothers, others like mothers, others like sisters. Hence, 1 Timothy 5:1-2 presupposes the structure of an argument. The church is like a family. Therefore you must treat fellow church members like fellow family members. The household analogy appears, then, to be one constituent element in Paul's own approach to articulating the nature of Christian church order. The author then asks:

How, then, do we know what sort of order is appropriate for Christian communal life? We know, in part, because Paul tells us in his letters. But how did Paul himself know? And how does he expect us to apply his teachings in circumstances slightly different from the ones he addressed in his letters? Paul had such wisdom partly because he had deeply absorbed the fundamental teaching of Christ about God being our Father and about Christ's saving work on the cross. Christ's work reconciled us to God and gave us intimate family communion with God, the communion of sons (Galatians 4:1-7). We are members of God's family. That family structure of God's church has definite implications about the specific forms of love to be exercised within the family (1 Timothy 3:1-7), the specific kind of management needed in dealing with family needs (1 Timothy 3:8-13), and so on.³²

In fact, almost the whole of 1 Timothy may be seen as a catalog of types of behavior and organization needed in a harmonious family. True doctrine is necessary because the family needs to know its own rules (1 Timothy 1:3-11, 18-20). Doctrine is therefore foundational for all the more specific kinds of organization and mutual relations within the family. Mercy and forgiveness bind the family together (1 Timothy 1:12-17). Protection is necessary from destructive outside interference and for the benefit of the rather enhances the life of the family, based on God's design from creation.³⁴

Such reasoning on Paul's part is the best context for understanding Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:8-15. There Paul sets out distinctive responsibilities for men (2:8) and women (2:9-15). The necessity of such distinction is best understood as flowing from the fact that men and women are not interchangeable within God's household, just as they are not within human families. Under the topic of women's responsibilities, beginning in 2:9, Paul includes the statement that a woman is not "to teach or to have authority over a man" (2:12). According to the previous arguments, this conclusion is a natural outcome of the analogy between the church and the human family, in which the wife is not to have authority over her husband (Ephesians 5:22-24). Again, Paul then appeals to the background of the order of creation (2:13), in which the pattern for a husband's authority is initially established. And again, he also appeals to the fall (2:14), in which male and female roles were not identical. Paul concludes with a reminder of one of the central and proper services of women, the bearing of children (2:15). This particular distinctive service by women reminds us more broadly of the larger responsibilities that women have in rearing children within a family – but not necessarily the main teaching role. Thus the whole passage organizes itself naturally once we understand the centrality of the idea of family and the fruitfulness of using human households as a basis for discerning people's responsibilities within God's household.

In summary of this argument, Paul bases his reasoning on general principles, going back ultimately to the Biblical account in Genesis 2 and 3. Paul has an understanding of God's plans and purposes in creating marriage and the family. Paul teaches that in the church, God's household, women are not to exercise authority over men, just as in a human family they are not to exercise authority over their husbands. Paul understands the position of overseer as involving the exercise of fatherly care over God's household. Hence women are excluded from being overseers on the basis of general Biblical principles concerning the family, not on the basis of some cultural influences or temporary circumstances.

Robust Christianity begins with fervent faith in Christ. When in faith we behold Christ in His true beauty and love, we begin to respond with vigorous love for Him. Love for Christ is in turn expressed and reflected in love for fellow Christians (1 John 4:20-21).

In particular, Christian love transforms the family. Husbands and wives begin to practice the Word of God in Ephesians 5:22-33 and begin to imitate the love that Christ has for the church and the submission that the church ought to practice to Christ. Christian love at its best and most intense is not merely a general, vague sentiment of love or an undefined impulse to do good. It is love in union with Christ. Our love ought to be enlivened by the supreme example of Christ, empowered by the resurrection of Christ, embodied in the practice of following Christ. In the family, such love will never find itself able to dispense with the power generated by the Christological analogy of Ephesians 5:22-33 and the Old Testament discourses about God as husband to Israel (for example, Hosea 2; Ezekiel 16; Isaiah 54:5-6). According to Ephesians 5:22-23, husbands have responsibilities like those of Christ, while wives have responsibilities like those of the church. The responsibilities are not simply interchangeable, any more than the

roles of Christ and the church are interchangeable. The Bible thus moves us away from any pure identity in the roles of husbands and wives. The husbands grow in imitation of the love of Christ and the wives grow in imitation of the submission of the church. The roles of husband and wife are not reversible. The Bible contradicts radical egalitarian philosophy, that is, a philosophy that says that men and women are in virtually all respects interchangeable and that their roles ought to have no relation to their sexual constitution. The author goes on to state:

Thus Christian marital practice gradually moves beyond the pure egalitarianism of some people and the immature domineering of others. Different Christian marriages may still have many differences, corresponding to the different gifts and different personalities of the two partners. But, as Christ transforms a marriage, a responsibility of overall family leadership and “headship” begins to be practiced by husbands in distinction from wives.³⁵

As Christians meet with one another and know one another more intimately, their sense of being one family grows. They begin to treat one another in the way Paul counsels: the older men as fathers, the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, the younger women as sisters (1 Timothy 5:1-2). People are no longer faceless masks, but real people, bound together by family ties. The same logic operative in natural families begins then to play itself out in the church as God’s household. In the intimacy of this spiritual family, people find that they are treating one another in a manner that respects differences of age, sex, and personality.

The presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in God’s household, as well as God’s own Fatherhood, demands the observance of household order. Quarrels, heresies, and various kinds of immaturity must be looked after rather than simply ignored or viewed with indifference. The intimacy of the spiritual family itself calls for loving involvement when there are sins and difficulties, not merely withdrawal or soupy tolerance. Poythress describes spiritual maturity thus:

In such situations, the “fathers” of the church stand out. Mature, sober, sound, godly men with exemplary family lives are the natural leaders in this extended family. First, the whole church naturally treats them as fathers and perceives the leadership abilities they exercise in their own immediate families. Second, church leadership in a situation of family intimacy is like family leadership—a matter not primarily of laying down formal rules but of setting a good example that naturally engenders admiration and that people attempt to emulate.

Paul himself functions as an example in subordination to Christ, who is the example par excellence (1 Corinthians 11:1). Timothy is exhorted to set a good example (1 Timothy 4:12). The general godliness of overseers, and not merely their doctrinal orthodoxy or speaking ability, is important to Paul for the same reason. Of course mature men and women should both function as examples in a general way (Titus 2:2, 3-5). But in the particular case of overseers, we are dealing with people who must be an example specifically in their family leadership, both leadership in God’s household and leadership in their own household. That natural qualification points the church away from looking for women and towards looking for men as overseers.³⁶

This analogy between family and church also helps to make clear what distinguishes the office of overseer from other roles in the church.

In the case of children in Titus 1:6, Paul indicates that the elders should be men “whose children believe,” in which case the whole family would regularly come to (church) and the obedience or disobedience of children to their father would be manifest at the services itself (see Titus 1:6; 1 Timothy 3:4). In fact, at a church gathering, the lines between family and church are not very clearly drawn, because the family comes to the meeting as a family and not merely as isolated individuals. Family worship at home and family worship with a larger group might seem very like one another, except that the larger group is the extended family—that is, God’s household.

All these factors, then, add up to generate a firm impulse to see the mature fathers in the church as the natural people to become fathers in a more extended and official sense, namely, fathers of the church as an extended spiritual family. If church life is as robust and intimate as it should be—if it is normal family life—the church will find itself recognizing male overseers even if hypothetically it did not have the specific instructions from the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

This analogy between family and church also helps to make clear what distinguishes the office of overseer from other roles in the church. Consider the situation within a natural family. Within a family we may

find a variety of skills, abilities, and gifts. A wise husband and father will encourage the full development and use of these abilities. His leadership, properly understood, is enhanced rather than threatened by the full flourishing of the family as a whole. Wise leaders should encourage the use of gifts. But in neither case does the existence of gifts overthrow the legitimacy of investing unique leadership in the father. Quite the opposite: the comparison with the family shows that gifts, in and of themselves, can never be a sound reason for displacing an order grounded in other factors from creation.

Ephesians 5:22-6:4 and other passages about the family clearly leave open a great many possibilities for the exact form of managerial arrangements. In these matters, a wise leader attempts to work out arrangements that best use and enhance the gifts of each family member. But Ephesians 5:22-6:4 does nevertheless draw some clear boundary lines. Children should submit to their parents, and conversely the parents have responsibility for managing their children. Wives should submit to their husbands, and husbands have managerial responsibility with respect to their wives, as well as for the rest of the household. These managerial responsibilities are fixed by God. Responsibilities can be delegated to other family members in accordance with their maturity and skills. But there is still a leader where the buck stops. The roles of men and women in marriage are at this point irreversible, not interchangeable.

In sum, a wise husband leads his household using the fullest consultation and conversation, and he delegates authority. In all these practices, he is simply imitating Christ's care for the church. Christ involves us in two-way conversation and delegates responsibilities to us. Christ is nevertheless the ultimate authority in all of life; husbands, subject to Christ's authority, have been assigned as heads of their households.

When Paul's instructions are abused and husbands use their authority as an excuse for selfish and domineering behavior, a reaction sets in. Many people in our day deplore the oppression of women and the foolishness involved in refusing to encourage them to test and use their gifts. If people do not have proper godly models before them, it is understandable that they should think a pattern of completely interchangeable responsibilities is the only reasonable alternative consistent with the freedom given us in Christ. Yet the actual goal of Scripture is richer.

The analogy between the natural family and God's household therefore suggests the same procedures for God's household. Responsibilities for management may, in a broad sense, be delegated and distributed throughout God's household. But the overseers, as fathers in the household, possess more ultimate authority. The overseers ought to be men, in analogy with the fact that the father and not the mother of a family possesses higher authority.³⁷

All of these cases illumine by analogy what may happen within the church as God's household. None of these cases negates the principle point that ideally fathers are to exercise overall authority in both family and church.

The author states, "Maintaining male leadership in the church is not a matter of indifference. Evil effects inevitably arise when we deviate from God's pattern. Such effects are largely the reverse side of the picture that we have been drawing. 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."³⁸

To begin with, absence of godly, fatherly leadership within the church makes the affirmation of the Fatherhood of God closer to an abstraction. God's Fatherhood is, of course, illustrated preeminently in the great deeds of the history of redemption that embody His fatherly rule, care, and discipline. But we are richer in our understanding of God because most of us have enjoyed having a human father, and we are richer still if we can see the fatherly care and the rule of God embodied at a practical level in the older men of the church (Titus 2:2) and especially in the overseers.

Church order can deviate from the ideal either by lacking overseers, by having unqualified overseers, by appointing women overseers, or by redefining the office of overseer. Any of these moves tends to make more vague people's experience of the church as a family. The lack of genuine practical correspondence between the church and Biblically-based natural families suppresses people's ability to see the analogy. Hence they lose some of their grip on the importance of family-like intimacy and support within the church. Moreover, they cease to understand that God's Fatherhood is expressed in His rule over us and that His rule is exercised in part through mature, father-like overseers.

In particular, radical egalitarian philosophy, which says that we are to treat all people exactly the same, hinders Christians from having the kind of sensitivity toward the age, sex, and position of others that Paul enjoins (1 Timothy 5:1-2, 17). Relations become more impersonal, and the realities of membership in one family of God recede out of Christians' consciousness and their practice. The author states,

The practice of Christian family life is also adversely affected. Most people learn far better from example, and from teaching closely related to their leaders' examples, than they do from teaching in the abstract. So how do they properly assimilate teaching about family life? Ideally, they imitate the family lives of their church leaders. But this imitation is most effective if they can actually see something of the family life of their leaders. For example, in a smaller group meeting in a home, they see the way the leader conducts himself with respect to the other family members present for worship. Christian worship in smaller groups becomes something very like family worship, which ought to be the heartbeat of life for each particular family. This whole process becomes confused when the distinctions between men and women, fathers and mothers, are overlooked. Ordinary families then have no direct models to build on.³⁹

It has been the goal of the feminist movement to free women from oppression. But such freedom in the true sense can come only through the divine powers of liberation and love contained in Jesus Christ. True freedom is found in faith in Christ; anything else only constitutes some form of slavery to sin.

The family more than any other single institution in modern society desperately needs freedom and renewal through the love of Christ. That freedom comes most effectively when we are able, under God, to harness the full, rich resources that He provides. We are to teach people above all to embody in their families the model of Christ set forth in Ephesians 5:22-23. And we are to teach them by examples that we set forth in the family-like life of the church, including the godly example of mature spiritual fathers, the overseers. Hence we hinder true liberation if we deviate from the pattern of male overseers. It would be ironic if a sincere desire for women's liberation should be corrupted in practice into its opposite, a hindrance to the liberating power of God that is at work in His household.

Some Christian people think Christian marriage ideally should express a radically egalitarian pattern: a husband and wife should in every respect be able to function interchangeably. If they were right, the analogy between family and church would suggest that men and women could in every respect have interchangeable roles within the church. The author concludes:

But they are not right. Ephesians 5:22-23 resists them, as do the other passages comparing the relation of God and His people to marriage. In time, we may hope that the Holy Spirit will use the power of these Biblical passages to generate godly marriages and so prevail over abstract egalitarian sentiments. If, as I believe, these Biblical passages do provide a warrant for assigning specific leadership responsibility to husbands and fathers, we need also to recognize the same pattern within the church. Mature men and not women are to be appointed overseers. But blind obedience to a formal rule is not sufficient. We must work towards more richly embodying in our churches the realities of our common life. We are children of God, members of one divinely ruled family. Only a full-orbed expression of Christ's love in the Christian community will bring to realization the freedom, power, and beauty derived from the manifestation of the glory of God in His household (Ephesians 3:10).⁴⁰

Martin Luther, in his classic treatise, "The Freedom of the Christian," said that all Christians are liberated from the bondage of sin through the gospel, whereupon they are called to be 'little Christs' to their neighbors.⁴¹ All vocations are thus ultimately to be Christological. However, men called into the vocations of leadership (headship) as husband, father, pastor, or member of a Christian congregation, are called out of themselves to love and to serve our neighbor which means to sacrifice for them. We know this from Christ, who came as the Bridegroom for His bride the Church and gave His life for her. May we men, baptized and forgiven, with God's help grow into these roles.

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