

RCOPC Statement on Church-Family Relations

The twentieth century marked the dissolution of the family in most western countries. America was no exception. As of 2006, the nuclear family (consisting of father, mother, and children) now makes up less than half of the households in America. At the same time 37% of children are born fatherless up from 5% in 1960, and roughly half of marriages end in divorce. What conclusions can we draw from these numbers but that the family is less relevant to American life than it ever has been in the past?

As church attendance remains over 40% in this country, we must place a large part of the blame for the dissolution of the family at the feet of the church. By its sins of omission or commission has the church contributed to the present demise?

Polls conducted by the Southern Baptist Church and other Christian pollsters have identified significant increases in the percentage of children raised Christian homes who leave the church upon leaving the home. Various studies put it anywhere between 75% and 90%.

We do not blame any particular denomination for the fragmentation of the family or the particular weakness of generational, covenantal continuity found in the church at large. Nevertheless, as elders and pastors in Christ's church, in our own experience we have seen a breakdown of family relationships, family discipleship, and an incidence of covenantal rebellion that we find utterly reprehensible and unacceptable for our families and for our congregation. Our hearts cry out to God for his mercy upon our sheep.

At the root, we believe that as a nation we have neglected the law of God as the source of our ethics, and we do not love him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

A rejection of God's law is evident when churches turn the exceptional into the normative, and thereby deny and violate the biblical norms that govern family and church relations. The biblical norm for the discipleship of children is unequivocally parental and familial.

Ex. 10:2 And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I am the LORD.

Deut. 6:7-9 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:
⁷And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ⁸And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. ⁹And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates

Pr. 1:8 My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

Pr. 3:1 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:

Pr. 4:3 For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. 4

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He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live. 5 Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.

Pr. 4:20 My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. 21 Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart.

Pr. 5:1 My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding:

Pr. 6:20 My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: 21 Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.

Pr. 7:1 My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. 2 Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. 3 Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.

Pr. 23:24 The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. 25 Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice. 26 My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

Pr. 24:21 My son, fear thou the LORD and the king:

Pr. 31:1 The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him. 2 What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows?

1 Th. 2:11 As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children.

Eph. 6:4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The Bible clearly lays out responsibilities and obligations by directing its exhortations towards specific people groups - slaves, civil rulers, wives, elders, husbands, fathers, and children.

To the extent that we neglect the specific addressee to which God's law is directed, we will perpetuate the jurisdictional free-for-all that marks our current age in which the state interferes with the family, the family interferes with the church, and the church interferes with the matters of the family.

The clear mandate of Scripture places the responsibility of the training of a child in the hands of the father. Paul considers this normative in 1 Thess. 2:11 and Eph. 6:4. And there is no perceptible change from the Old Testament mandate and pattern contained in Deuteronomy 6 and the book of Proverbs. In point of fact, this is basic to a biblical social system. The health of the church is dependent upon the presence of godly men who rule their households well. For it is only those who rule their own households first, that are fit to rule in the household of God (1 Tim. 3:5). Thus, rather than circumventing or displacing fathers in their duties, the church is obligated to equip fathers in the

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congregation for this ministry work which God places upon them (Eph. 4:11-12).

To the extent that the church's children's ministries have displaced in the minds and lives of individuals or institutions the father's responsibilities and the family's obligations laid out by the biblical normative in Deut. 6:7, Proverbs, 1 Thess. 2:11, Eph. 6:4, etc., those church's activities should be re-considered and re-configured.

We do not hold to the notion that Sunday Schools, Youth Groups, and other children's programs are inherently sinful, yet it appears that in the minds of many parents these programs make up the essence of "Christian education" or discipleship for children. Some denominations choose to refer to their committees responsible for children's ministries and Sunday Schools as "Christian Education" committees. Generally, this sends the wrong message to parents, if parental discipleship is the normative means by which children will be matured in the faith.

Thus, it is a question of emphasis. We believe that the church in aggregate has not adequately emphasized the principles contained in Deut. 6:7, Proverbs, 1 Thess. 2:11, Eph. 6:4, etc.

This does not preclude children from participating in the worship service with their parents. Quite the opposite, God requires children to be present in the congregation of the saints (Deut. 29:10, Deut. 31:12, Josh. 8:35, 2 Chron. 20:13, Neh. 12:43, Joel 2:16, Eph. 6:1).

While this also does not preclude occasional age-segregated activities, we believe that the church and family need to keep in mind that we are emerging out of 100 years of wholesale fragmentation in the family. This fragmentation came about by various means, not to exclude the modern corporate systems that separated the family economically. Husbands and wives pursued their individual career tracks and children were remanded to daycare, kindergarten, and K-12 schools. Siblings were separated by age segregation. Increasingly non-interactive forms of entertainment also prevented cultivation of family relationships. While our purpose is not to criticize any particular element of this list as malum in se, the cumulative effects of such social changes have wrought immeasurable damage upon the sphere of the family in modern life, because it represents a flagrant disregard of God's law.

Therefore, this is a call to reformation in the church by the reviving of the law of God in the hearts of men, that will manifest itself in the way we live, the way we interact, the way we minister, and the way we worship.

Issued by the Reformation OPC Session, July 17, 2007