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THE FAMILY

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"To make a government requires no great prudence. Settle the seat of power; teach obedience; and the work is done. To give freedom is still more easy. It is not necessary to guide; it only requires to let go the rein. But to form a free Government; that is, to temper together these opposite elements in one consistent work, requires much thought, deep reflection, a sagacious, powerful, and combining mind."

WITH THESE words, Edmund Bourke, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France, 1790*, aptly stated the problem of building a stable society and a form of government that balances coercive power on the one hand and liberty and freedom on the other.

In Australia, as elsewhere around the world, there is a growing movement of rethinking the meaning of government. This has been brought about by a number of circumstances. For example, the health and human relations courses offered in Victorian schools in the early 1980s resulted in large public reaction against such classes. Parents, however, were apparently not to be given a voice in determining curriculum content and the classes continued. So the parents voted with their feet, and Christian schools and home schooling began a serious rise in the 1980s.

Moving north, New South Wales became the fertile soil for a growing "gay" movement that has entrenched itself. The election of the Rev Fred Nile in 1981, in which I was pleased to play a small part, also helped put many moral issues on the agenda, each one of which raised

the issue of the nature and purpose of government.

Further north again, attempts were at one time made to introduce an education bill into the Queensland parliament that would lead to a loss of personal freedom in choosing an education in keeping with personal religious convictions. More recently the One Nation phenomenon whose short-lived influence created temporary havoc in the Liberal and National parties helped many people rethink the nature and purpose of government.

On top of all this the Republican Movement has cast a long shadow as it argues that the problem is the form of government rather than, as the Bible asserts, a problem of the character of the people who are governors and of those who are governed.

Many solutions to the current system have been offered. Even among Christians there is no single solution to the problem of government. Some even think there is no specific God-given solution to the role and purpose of government and think trying to answer such questions is the wrong direction for the Christian mind. This leaves some to want the various governments to solve the

problems through legislative and bureaucratic regulations. Others desire to see less governmental regulation and more personal freedom, thus implying that less civil government will cure many, if not all, ills.

Over the past twenty years we have heard most variations of these two basic themes offered by those within and those outside the Christian faith. For those who want to see less civil government, however, there are various decisions to be made. If the functions currently being performed by civil authorities are halted yet those activities are essential to the health and welfare of people, who then should undertake these tasks?

From the biblical perspective, *the family* is the neglected institution. In Eden, prior to the fall, God created man and woman with the purpose that families might be established. Notice that families come before Presidents and Prime Ministers. If there was to be an authority established, it was within the family. Yet each family, as mankind multiplied, would become its own "kingdom" with its own king and queen – husband and wife – in authority. "Therefore shall a man leave his father

and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh" (Deut. 2:24).

God's dealing with families is seen in the examples of Noah (Gen. 6:8), Abraham (Gen. 12:7, 17:8, 2-14) and Jacob (Gen. 46:3-7). Three of the Ten Commandments protect the family: respect and honour towards parents, the prohibition against adultery, and the command against coveting the possession of others (Ex. 20:12, 14, 17). Of special interest is the story of Naboth and his vineyard, since he would sell his property to Ahab, even though he had been given an above market price for it. His reason for no sale was because the land was a *family inheritance* and he could not dispossess his family's future generations. The various inheritance laws in the Mosaic legal code were designed to preserve and protect the family (Lev. 25:10). The Disobedience to God results in Him "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations" (Deut. 5:9). In the New Testament we see God again dealing with the families or Cornelius (Acts 10:2, 24), Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16: 15, 33),

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Narcissus (Rom. 16:11) and Stephanus (I Cor. 1:16).

Not only do we see God dealing with families, but to families He gave specific tasks. To the family the task of education is directed (Deut. 6:7) and family members are to care for the needs of one another (I Tim. 5:8). Education and welfare, thus, are essential domains of the family, not the political order.

Given the economic status given to families in the Bible, it is not too difficult to understand the idea that the family forms the basic unit in society. The family is the child's first nursery, first school, first hospital when he is ill, first provider of welfare, first provider of justice, first provider of government and his first church. Even in non-Christian families this is true, except for the latter point. And then, we might argue, the church is the church of humanity rather than the church of God Almighty.

Therefore, if we are to attempt to reform political institutions our first goal must be to reform government and to achieve this we must first reform government in the home. If we are not happy with the political order, we must be unhappy for a reason. If the civil authorities have too much encroaching power, then how did they get this power? Did the family abandon one of its God-given duties, such as education? If so, can we really expect a reform of education without a reform of the family – *first*?

But if we are to work a reform in the family, we must find a place to start. And here's a suggestion: *the restoration of family worship in each Bible-believing home*. Imagine what

influence a *family* that worships daily as a family might bring to the world around it. How will such a family influence those in business, in government, and those in the church? Will it readily abandon education to a system that, in order to maintain religious neutrality, distorts the Christian message in its classrooms? Will husbands and wives readily abandon the governance of their children to complete strangers, many of whom do not uphold the faith of the parents?

Just as importantly, or even more importantly for some, what would such a family bring to the worship service at the local church? Will it be seeking to obtain its once-a-week gratification from a weekly remembrance? Or will it rather see this weekly activity as an extension of its family worship, the coming together of worshipping families from the local community so that together they might raise a mighty roar of praise to God the Creator and Redeemer? If singing in the church needs awakening, a family that sings unto the Lord and one another "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19) on a regular if not daily basis, cannot help but add harmony and vitality to church worship.

If political institutions are to be changed then reform in the family is needed first. How can good civil government be obtained unless good family government is practised in the first instance (I Tim. 3:5)? The increase in crime and disobedience to the laws of the nation has a direct relationship to the disobedience that is first exercised in the home.

If submission to authority is not enforced in the home, we cannot expect it to be obeyed in the civil realm. If daily worship of God is not inculcated from the time of inception, a time when researchers now tell us is quite influential on the soon-to-be born child, we can hardly expect this child to attend worship once a week when he becomes an adult. The patterns have been set – in the home. And if this is where they are set, then here is where they must be changed.

Husbands

THROUGHOUT HISTORY people have wrestled with the problem of how to have a form of government that allows true freedom without degenerating into anarchy. Society cannot function very well under anarchy, just as it functions appallingly under totalitarianism. Anarchy encourages dictatorships as a way of solving the problem of government, and dictatorships lead to the despair of the people. Dictators restore law and order but in the

process comes a loss of personal freedom.

A similar problem exists in the family. The family is essentially a commonwealth consisting of independent empires, each empire being the will of a member of the family. Each of these empires is to be brought into subjection to the Word of God and this is the function of the parents. Specifically, the husband, or father, is given duties within the family relating to governance.

Prior to the entrance of sin in the world there was harmony between individuals. While each person's will remained independent to allow the free development of personality, there would have been no conflict with other individuals because there was no desire to make one person's will the source of all authority. This is the essence of sin as described in Gen. 3:5.

The entrance of sin into the world altered the previous state of things. Now, instead of harmony there would be discord as fallen, yet still independent, will oppose each other. In order to resolve this conflict there must be a court of appeal, and in the family this function is vested in the head of the home, usually the husband/father. This is seen in the biblical injunctions for wives to "submit" and children to "obey" (Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-22).

Note the Scriptures do not say the husband is to rule as a tyrant or dictator. Instead, he is commanded to *love*. Before we rush off into some romantic notions about love, we do well to remember that in the bible, love is essentially tied together with obedience to God. If you *love* me, says Jesus, you will obey my commandments (John 14:15, I John 5:3). Without love in this sense the head of the family quickly degenerates into nothing more than a "sovereign head of state" who cares little for his subjects. He becomes a tyrant. Thus, the command to love tempers the severity of the husband's rule.

The husband as head of the home is not just an abstract ideal. It has the very important aspect of depicting, however imperfectly, the manner in which Christ is head of the church (Eph. 5:23). Thus, by the way he rules, the husband/father is able to visually demonstrate, in a very practical fashion, this aspect of Christ's work. How many husbands could say: "See the manner in which I rule; it depicts in some small way Christ's headship over His church." The husband thus has the potential of enormous influence in the home. Of course this influence may not always be good in a fallen world, for in the neglect of his duties the husband

would present a distorted image of Christ's headship.

The role of head of the family is thus a very demanding one. But the means for ensuring success are often overlooked, such as *daily* family worship.

Many of the defects and transgressions of our respective duties are due to the lack of consideration we give them. We do not think! Family worship, for example, provides the head of the family with the opportunity to contemplate the activities and welfare of those in his care. Family worship also inculcates the idea that religion is more than a Sunday affair. As the head of the family studies the Scriptures in order to instruct his family, he is ever reminded of the duties and responsibilities that God places upon him. As he prays specifically for each and every member of the family by name, their spiritual and material well-being is constantly brought to his attention. And as family members present their intimate petitions to God, they are drawn closer to Him and to each other in true Christian love and fellowship. The maintenance of family worship is primarily entrusted to the head of the family, and as the head the husband and father cannot expect those under him to attain a more consistent Christian life than that which he exemplifies.

Thus, through family worship, the husband, as head of the family commonwealth, is enabled to rule and exercise his authority. Is it any wonder that modern society is falling apart, considering the manner in which the husband's authority and family worship have been downgraded, even by many professing Christians? In 1859, Rev S. Phillips observed, *"In this age of extreme individualism, we have almost left out of view the mission of home as the first form of society, and the important bearing it has upon the formation of character. Its interests are not appreciated; its duties and privileges are neglected . . . parents are inclined to renounce their authority; and children, brought up in a state of domestic libertinism, neither respect nor obey their parents as they should."*

With the decline of family worship has come the inability to work out a form of government that fits with the biblical pattern. Changes in the Constitution won't solve the problems. More laws won't solve the problems. Less laws, although welcome, will at least leave people free to start to exercise self-government. And this, we feel, is closer to the Biblical pattern than the alternative we live under. But the exercise of self-government cannot begin in

earnest until family worship is restored and the husband sits as head of the family commonwealth governing those God has put under his jurisdiction.

The crass materialism which predominates our culture has left its mark. And the cause must be laid at the feet of Christian husbands and fathers who have refused to insist on family worship and godly authority in the home. Writing in 1847, Rev. J.A. Alexander noted that *"In the rage for amassing wealth, which threatens our great commercial cities, there is an estranging process going on, which we fear is too little observed. Such is the insane precipitation which the man of business rushes to his morning's task, and such the length of his absence from home, often extending till the hours of darkness, that he gradually loses some of that parental tenderness which Providence keeps alive by the presence of those whom we love. The long continuance of such habits cannot fail to affect the character. Of all persons in the world, he should be most willing to take time for family devotion, who is by his very employment shut out from his home most of every day. The paternal heart demands this hour of culture. A deliberate service, in which the voices of infancy and age unite in praising God, amidst the flow of mutual affection, is a blessed means of countervailing the hard and selfish world which surrounds him."*

Recent decades have seen longer working hours as the financial and economic systems of the world attempt to bolster up a godless system held together by the fragile strings of debt and manipulation of the system by the governments of the world through their appointed central banks. And we wonder where we went wrong. Look no further than the family table and its lack of family worship.

Women's Liberation

BUT THE RESTORATION of government, starting in the home, does not stop with the father. For the family commonwealth is not ruled by a king alone, but he is joined by a queen who, rightly or wrongly, can exercise – and does exercise – enormous power in the family commonwealth.

The feminist movement has emphasized the idea of freedom for women. Theirs has been a call for the abandonment of many traditional values to replace them with new ideas for the role of women in the family and the wider community. In

some respects it is difficult to disagree with the feminist movement.

The Enlightenment era, while supposedly exalting women and placing them on a pedestal, actually debased them by giving them a position of inferiority. If the woman's place is in the kitchen, then her education could be kept to a minimum. Education, therefore, was often reserved for the male members of the family. This treatment of women was clearly unwarranted if the Bible is our guide. But on the whole the feminist agenda raises serious problems for the Christian.

The Bible is insistent that true liberty is to be found only in conformity with the will of God (James 1:25; 2:8, 12). On the other hand, the modern concept of freedom is that freedom and liberty are only achieved when the individual is completely "free" to do his or her own thing. No restraints. No ties. No obligations. If it feels good do it, and never mind the consequences to yourself or to others.

Scripture, on the other hand, asserts that this form of "freedom" is really slavery. Throughout, the Bible speaks of bondage to sin and opposes this to the "glorious liberty" that is available to those who are the children of God and who therefore live in obedience to their heavenly Father (Rom. 8:15, 21; Gal. 2:4; 4:9; 5:1). True freedom and liberty are not found in doing one's own thing but rather are found in living under the authority of God.

Due to the modern idea of freedom, there is, even among Christians, some reaction to the injunction that wives should submit to their husband's authority (Col. 3:18). On the surface it appears to put the wife in a position of slavery to her husband. Submit! But does this necessarily place the woman into such an inferior position? We think not, and for good reasons.

It should be noted carefully that the term "submit" involves an act of voluntary choice. That choice ought to be made, however, before the wedding day. It may be considered unreasonable for any husband, after the wedding, to expect his wife to submit to his authority unless prior to the wedding the woman has thought through the implications of *voluntarily* accepting that she should submit to her husband's authority. A woman *does* have the very real freedom, *prior to the marriage*, of refusing to submit to a husband, and she may remain single to maintain her autonomy. But should she decide to marry, then the Biblical position is that she submit to her husband's lawful authority.

In this view, marriage becomes a contract, where both parties *voluntarily* undertake respective duties and obligations. Too often, pre-marriage counselling fails to help the couple think through these duties and obligations which marriage involves. Irrespective of this lack of pastoral oversight, however, the point is that a woman does have a choice whether or not she will submit. But that choice after marriage is no longer available if the woman is to follow the biblical injunction to submit to her husband.

Now the feminist movement would have us believe that submission to a husband is slavery, barbarous and most "unfeminine." But how can something done voluntarily, by conscious choice, be degrading to a person? After all, marriage is not compulsory.

In exchanging her autonomy for the submissive role of a wife and mother, the woman does not become inferior, for she is still a separate and distinct personality who is, in many respects, the equal of her husband. One of the more important recognitions of this fact is that in becoming a submissive wife, the woman obtains at the same time a position of authority that would not be available to her had she remained single. Thus, what is lost on the one hand is gained with the other. What has been sacrificed by submission has been compensated for by the gaining of a new position of authority where she jointly rules in the family commonwealth with her husband, although in submission to him.

But there is something even more important at stake here. In this voluntary act of submission the wife portrays the principle of salvation where, by grace, sinful human beings are restored to fellowship with God. Salvation is not achieved without a choice being made. "Repent and be saved." Or, "believe and be saved." These demand an act of the will (through recognising that unaided by divine power the human will will remain in its obstinate rejection of God). The act of submission, therefore, far from being a downgrading of the wife, exalts her to a unique position within the family, recognising that this position is not one of ultimate authority within the family.

On this point, Rev. B.M. Palmer wrote: *"She is allowed to carry this principle down into all the details of life; and by a thousand acts to show how the will may turn upon its own pivot, and more freely under the law of control. It is a wonderful privilege afforded to her who, 'being deceived, was in the transgression,' to be called*

thus openly to assert and illustrate the spontaneous loyalty of a will that perfectly blends with the authority that directs it. Such a mission is immeasurably grander in its proportions, and sweeter in its beneficence, than all the usurped dignities of the unsexed sisterhood who aspire, contrary to nature, to be the competitor and rival of man, rather than his counterpart and helpmeet."

In other words, the submissive wife is able to visibly demonstrate the reality that living in submission to an authority other than oneself does not necessarily mean the loss of personality and freedom. In addition, when enforcing submission upon her own children she may use her own submission as an example which her offspring might emulate.

In the act of submission the woman solves the problem of all government that involves more than one person. In society there are two choices: either have complete anarchy (do your own thing) or some form of totalitarianism to which everyone submits. That totalitarianism will originate either in God (the "Higher Law" of western political systems) or in man. This latter choice always brings slavery and bondage under the dictatorship of an individual or group.

Conclusion

THE SOLUTION to political reform is the restoration of the Biblical family to its exalted position. Here it may again provide the basis for reforming the political state, just as it could be used to reform the church, also in need of drastic reform. The family, where authority and submission and obedience to that authority can be seen to elevate each individual to a higher place of significance. The family, rather than a place of individual degradation, thus should be seen as place of high exaltation.

What better example could our children have than godly a godly husband who loves them, adores them, will not only provide for their material well-being, but more importantly lead them to the throne and presence of God daily in family worship? Could our children ask for a better example of what it means to limit one's autonomy than a godly wife and mother who displays the virtues of submission, patience and tolerance towards those to whom she must submit, often when such submission is required under extreme difficulties?

No political order has been able to solve the problem of reform.

When the Roman Empire fell, it was not a political system that created Christendom. Christendom existed when the family was the centre of society, and the family commonwealth wielded more power than any commonwealth manufactured in the political sphere. Christendom expired when the politicians took control over the family, and those laws that God ordained to protect the family were overruled by the parliaments of demagogues.

No true reform will come from the political sphere that does not first come from a reform of the family. Unless a man has solved the problem of authority and government in his home, he is unlikely to solve it in the parliament as he tries to rule people who are complete strangers to him. The very notion of a man wanting to rule other men's families is itself an insult to his fellow man and an insult to God. And no amount of vain reasoning can justify the modern politician's claim to what amounts to a false authority. His authority, by being outside the domain of God's pattern for society, is thus a recipe for disaster, a plan for failure.

Until godly fathers and mothers arise, however, and restore the family commonwealth to its exalted position, the politicians, the demagogues, the bureaucrats who outlive the politicians will continue to prevail. And the people will groan under its government while they wonder why it is that the politicians are such failures at creating heaven on earth.

The solution to the problem is before us. It begins with one small step, followed by others to be sure. But until those first steps are taken by husbands and wives who intend to be faithful to God, political reform will remain a charade and continue to invite the judgement of God upon a people who refuse to do things His way.