

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO FAMILIES?

This article is taken from chapter 2 of the Philip Lancaster's upcoming book with the working title of Family Man, Family Leader.

Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.
1 Corinthians 14:20

One of the first rules of land navigation is that you have to know where you are before you can figure out how to get where you are going. If I hand you a road atlas of the United States and ask you to plot a course to Tishomingo, Mississippi, you won't be able to do that if you don't know on what piece of ground you are standing at the moment. The directions you take will be quite different starting from Atlanta, Georgia, than they will be if you begin in Spokane, Washington. (Even this former Army Reserve chaplain learned that much about map reading when he was in the service!)

Do you know where you are standing, or sitting, at this moment? If you are bright enough to be reading this page, I'm quite confident the answer is, Yes. Locating ourselves physically is not a great challenge, after all. As I write this I'm in a trailer in the woods on a hillside off Firehouse Road in the Blue Ridge mountains, Floyd County, Virginia, USA. Sorry, I can't give you the exact latitude and longitude, not having any GPS equipment handy.

Let me ask you another question. Do you know where you are standing historically and culturally at the moment? (Pause for thought. — this is a much bigger challenge.) I'm not just talking about things like your nationality, your language, and the century in which you live. I'm wondering if you realize where you stand in the flow of events and ideas that have shaped our whole society, its ways of thinking and its manners of living.

Do you know what factors have influenced your educational choices; your choice of vocation; your music preferences; your ways of relating to elderly relatives; your family's dress and appearance; your view of children, of money, of marriage and divorce; your views of welfare, of global warming, of the military; etc.?

The answer is that history and culture have shaped you, as they have me. We are all the products of the modern world and we are all influenced by its ideas and by the social and economic structures that make it up. It is true that we are also shaped by subcultures within this larger culture: for example, the South or the North, the city or the country, the university or the trade school. But these subcultures contain very little variation within the main themes of the dominant culture of Western society.

In order to carefully plan our route toward the destination that God sets before us as Christian fathers, we have to understand the culture which has molded us. Let me commend to you the example of some men who are mentioned in a rather obscure portion of Scripture. We need to be like "the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. 12:32). For us to know what to do

at the present time we need not only to know the Bible, we also need to have an "understanding of the times" in which we live so that we know how to *apply* the Bible in a way that will make a difference to our families and, by God's grace, to the whole culture.

This chapter is designed to help us figure out where in the world we are. We will look briefly at the historical trends and ideas that have formed the world around us and that have affected our views of manhood, the family, and the roles of fathers. With this accomplished, we can then take up the Bible as our map and compass and begin to plot out the course toward the God-ordained goal of biblical patriarchy.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Now don't get me wrong, I don't have any desire to go back to the 1600s. I'm quite happy to have running water, sewage systems, electricity, telephones, cars, and the computer on which I am typing this. Not to mention, with my wife in mind, vacuum cleaners, automatic washers and dryers, electric grain grinders, and bubble-gum-flavored antibiotics for the little ones' earaches.

I'm not talking about technology when I refer to times past as "the good old days." I'm talking about family life. And there is no question whatsoever in my mind that the 17th and 18th centuries in America were much better in that regard than today.

For folks back then, as for most people through most of world history, life was centered in the home and the surrounding community. Here is Brian Abshire's description of that period (*Patriarch* issue 22, p. 17):

Before the Industrial Revolution, most people lived in small communities. The same families lived in the same locales for generations, since the family was tied to the land. Mom and Dad usually came from the same community and therefore shared a common cultural background, values and sense of identity. Children were an asset; every extra pair of hands meant the farm could produce more food (or the craftsman more products). Mom's domestic skills, baking, cooking, sewing, etc., were desperately needed in the home. Children worked closely with their parents from a young age. Dad worked with the sons in the fields (or at his craft), Mom with the daughters in the house. Children learned not only skills, but character and values at the same time.

As late as the early 19th century over 90 percent of American families lived either on farms or in small villages. This rural way of life centered on the homes of the communities, each having its own vibrant economy, with each member of the family contributing something to the provision of the home. Since children were an obvious economic asset, there were lots of them, with the average mother bearing seven children in her lifetime.

Although fathers were no more perfect in the old days than today, the social organization back then made it much less of a challenge for a man to turn his heart toward home. Here is how

the Hories state it in *Whatever Became of Fathering?* (p. 36-37)

Up until the Industrial Revolution, life in Europe — and, for the most part, in America — was centered within the framework of the home. The father worked in the immediate vicinity of the home. Not only was he available to his children, but the children were also included in his work. The sons were his apprentices; he was the one who taught them how to farm or to work with the tools of the trade. It was taken for granted that the sons would pursue his vocation as adults. They worked with the father in order to perpetuate his enterprise. Since each was dependent upon the other, their closeness engendered a mutual trust.

The role of fathers in these homes was clearly defined: the father was the leader; and it did not occur to anyone to challenge this biblical notion. In *Missing From Action: Vanishing Manhood in America*, Weldon Hardenbrook confirms this (p. 31).

... [C]olonial families were also unquestionably overseen by men. It was a paternal society. Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of old, colonial men held to the patriarchal model of family structure. "Both society and household were frankly patriarchal in the seventeenth century based on the supreme authority of men as fathers," writes professor of history Mary Ryan. "Women were subject to fathers and husbands within the household, and barred from positions of independence and authority outside it."

Fathers ruled their homes, with their wives by their sides as their vital domestic partners, and with both being an integral part of their children's daily lives. A mutual love and confidence was the bond that held the family together under the father's oversight and direction.

The extent of respect for a father's authority can be witnessed in this example taken from *Virginians at Home*, by Edmund S. Morgan, shared in Mr. Hardenbrook's book (p. 45):

In 1708 Ann Walker, an Anglican married to a Quaker, objected in court to having her children educated as Quakers, but the Court, while acknowledging her own freedom to worship as she chose, instructed her not to interfere in any way with the instruction of her children, even forbidding her to expound any part of the scriptures to the children without her husband's consent. Such complete support for the husband's authority is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that the Anglican Church was the established church of Virginia, to which all the members of the court doubtless belonged.

This total oversight of the home by men led to a very natural and consistent result: men were also the leaders in the churches and the communities, as well as in business and civil institutions. As Mary Ryan writes in *Womanhood in America*

(p. 21), "Only the patriarch of the family... could rise to leadership in political, cultural, and religious affairs."

This patriarchal way of life was a wholesome balance of order and freedom, authority and relationship, which is what God designed the family to be. Rev. Abshire again (*Patriarch* 22, p. 17):

Work, recreation, religion, and welfare were all family oriented and contributed to a sense of identity and belonging. Children had both economic as well as social incentive to maintain close family ties. They inherited the land, expanding the family's economic basis. The extended family assisted during emergencies. The sociological background therefore reinforced biblical family values.

The "frankly patriarchal" society of early America was the ideal environment for a man to live out his biblical duties to lead and love his family and to train up his children in the Lord.

However, things were soon to change... and on a scale unprecedented in history.

THE EXODUS OF FATHERS

Historical trends do not begin on a particular date on the calendar, but there is general agreement that the Industrial Age was ushered in by the invention of the steam engine by James Watt in 1764. It took some decades for this new source of mechanical power to be perfected and used on a wide scale, but once it did it changed the shape of society. Following the steam engine came the development of many other machines that harnessed this great power, applying it to the accomplishment of tasks and to the production of goods which before had required the labor of man or animals. This led to the creation of factories and systems of mass production.

Industrialism made an impact on the home in several negative ways. First, and most significantly, *industrialism took fathers away from their wives and children*. The factories needed the laborers and paid cash wages. So men left their farm or trade and went to work for other men in the task of mass production. Thus began what we now take for granted: the father who is away from his family for most of the day, earning his wages so that he can buy the goods manufactured in the factories. The shift of the focus of production from the home to the factory led to fathers shifting their attention from their families to their jobs. As Alan Carlson stated, "In this new order, the home became separated from the factory and the office, a revolutionary shift in human living patterns." (*Patriarch* 36, p. 10)

Second, *the need for home production and the small trades gradually diminished*. If a factory can make candles by the millions and sell them cheap, why should a mother and her girls labor to make candles themselves? The same question could be asked in regard to fabric, clothing, baskets, soap, butter, and so many other products formerly manufactured by the cooperative efforts of the family members in the home. Thus industrialism left women to run the homes while having less meaningful work to do there.

As to the trades, how can a cobbler stay in business when shoes made in factories are available for a fraction of the cost?

Think also of the blacksmith, the wheelwright, the tinsmith, and the tailor... not to mention, in time, the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker. If these tradesmen had not already closed shop to go work in the factory themselves, they soon went out of business simply because of a lack of demand for their goods. And what could they then do but go work in the factories themselves? Home- and community-based manufacturing thus became obsolete.

Third, *children lost their significant place in the family and in the hearts of their fathers*. With the loss of home production, children became, over time, economic liabilities instead of assets, consumers instead of producers. The quite natural result was that families had less and less children. For Christian families this meant that there were fewer “arrows” produced to carry on the task of spreading the kingdom of Christ.

Fathers no longer directed the day to day affairs of their homes; nor could they now train their sons to follow them on the farm or in the family trade since there was no more farm or trade. But the economic shift was not the most significant effect of this new cultural trend. The truly tragic effect was the loss of relationship between a father and his children. With the father gone so much of the time, the development of mutual trust and love, previously taken for granted, was now greatly hindered.

YET MORE CHALLENGES

Aside from its direct affects on family structure and relationships, industrialism created a new type of society that put further strains upon the home. *Urbanization*, a natural result of the need to bring together large business enterprises and the workers they need to function, overwhelmed the family unit. Instead of relating to a few other families of similar values in small communities, families now were lost in a sea of anonymous faces, with fewer significant relationships. Cities also tended to become concentration points for the baser of human tendencies and the temptations of evil became more readily accessible to family members. The effects of urbanization at its extremes can now be found, on the one hand, in the anonymity of the modern suburbs where people often don't know their next-door neighbors, and, on the other hand, the inner-city “neighborhoods” where derelict buildings hold derelict children and “father” is strictly a biological term.

Modern *transportation*, another direct result of industrialism, has created unprecedented mobility. First the train, then the automobile, and finally the airplane have made it easy for families to move in pursuit of better jobs and more income. (Add to this the practice of sending our children away to Universities in far away towns.) (1700's - industrial revolution: fathers leave the home; 1800's - state mandated public schools: mothers leave the homes; 1900's - feminist movement: mothers leave the home. What will this century bring?) Gradually the ties of location were severed and families moved about at will with little or no regard for what used to be known as the “home place,” the community of extended family and friends that made up the world of families in “the good old days.” Transportation also has made it easier for children to leave the home, whether on Friday night for a date or to set up their own apartment in a city far away.

Yet another product of industrialism, *consumerism* has eaten away at the heart and soul of the family. Those who mass produce goods naturally find it necessary to create a mass market for their products. So they use the mass media to quite literally brainwash the population into buying their products. Family members, who used to be producers, are now consumers. The consumer mentality amounts to a materialistic focus in the heart of a person, and at its worst, it becomes a continual, insatiable lust for more and more manufactured things that, he thinks, will make him feel good or boost his self-esteem. Such a movement of the soul is contrary to the spiritual, God-centered preoccupation to which Christian parents and children are called.

A final perverse effect of industrialism is its intrinsic tendency toward the progressive *acceleration* of its other effects. All of the family-damaging trends increased their pace throughout the twentieth century. One noteworthy example: the two world wars drew even the women into the workforce in great numbers in order to support the war effort and because the men were away fighting and dying. It has since become the norm for women to work out of the home — and who can blame them when there is no one at home and no work to do there?

At the beginning of the 21st century the family is a mere shell of its former self. At its best it is the mere nuclear family, cut off from kin, living in anonymous cities, without productive work in the home, and with both parents working and the children away at school. With each family member feeling the centrifugal pull of out-of-home commitments, they hardly have any time together. The father's heart is at his job, the children's hearts with their classmates and friends. Add to this the mind-numbing and soul-destroying distractions of contemporary music, television, and movies — the latest “blessings” of our industrial- technological society — and you round out the picture of the challenges Christian fathers face in attempting to become true family men once again.

IS WEALTH WORTH THE PRICE?

I said before that I am not willing to turn the clock back and return to pre-industrial times, but I have to ask: Is it worth it? Has the fruit of the industrial age been worth the price? Of course I realize that what's done is done, and so it may appear pointless to even raise the question. But my concern in asking it is not so much to evaluate a historical trend as it is to try to sharpen in us the trait of discernment. Remember what set apart the sons of Issachar: they had “understanding of the times” and so knew what to do.

There is no debating the marvelous blessings that have come with the giant strides technology has taken in the last two hundred years. I could not produce *Patriarch* magazine as I do, virtually by myself, if it weren't for computers and laser printers and scanners. And don't even get me started on the value of the Bible program I have on both my desktop and laptop computers which includes scores of commentaries and study books, multiple versions of the Bible including Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, and advanced search capabilities that work with lightening speed. Such a tool greatly enhances the potential productivity of Bible study time.

The cumulative effect of families having a myriad such tools at their disposal is that we are truly the wealthiest generation to have inhabited the earth. Each of our domestic servants — be it the computer, the dishwasher, or the car — enhances our material quality of life the same or even more than if we had a cadre of human servants. Freeing us from the demands of drudgery, we have more time available for nobler pursuits. This is beyond doubt a great blessing.

My question, though, is whether these blessings are worth the price we have paid for them as a society and as families. Reflecting on the changes industrialism brought, Rev. Abshire comments, “These changes in culture undermined and destroyed the sociological foundations that had held the family together from antiquity.” (*Patriarch* 22, p. 17) Addressing the same subject, the Hories conclude, “The material rewards were often great, but the price was high: the loss of family ties.” (p. 39) Are the material blessings worth the social and spiritual costs?

My answer is an unequivocal No! If I had to choose, I would rather be in a materially poor society where families were intact and fathers were bound to their children than to be in a rich society with families fragmented to the point of practical dissolution. Material prosperity is not worth the price of family destruction.

The next question is this: Is family disintegration a necessary effect of material improvement? In other words, do we have to choose either material prosperity or family health? And a related question: Am I suggesting that we need to all become farmers or tradesmen and return to the agrarian patterns of the past in order for families to survive?

There are some profound and complex issues inherent in these questions that, frankly, I don’t know that I am even capable of addressing. Suffice it to say that there is no inherent contradiction between technology and wealth, on the one hand, and family health and solidarity, on the other. And, no, I don’t believe the only solution is a return to an agrarian way of life, though that would be an excellent choice for some families and communities.

I believe the real problem is rather that *Christians have failed to be discerning in their response to developing technology and the social changes it has brought*. This is the real issue, not technology itself. Christian men too often went off to work at the factories without a thought for how this would alter home life. Many fathers have moved every few years to pursue a higher income without considering the toll this takes on family members and their connections to other significant people. Men have been caught up in the flow of social change without any serious reflection or discussion about how these changes affected their fundamental duties.

Given how far we have come through the industrial/technical social transformation, I believe the only thing we fathers can do now is to become self-conscious about every choice we make from here on. Fathers need to ask, Will this choice enhance the spiritual and relational dimensions of my family’s life? Will it turn my heart to my children and theirs to me? Is this choice compatible with the principles and commands of Scripture? If the answers are yes, we can proceed. If no, then we had better stop and think about other options.

Technology and the wealth it brings can be a blessing or a curse. We have allowed them to be a curse because we have indiscriminately followed wherever technology and money have led, justifying the spiritual costs by the material gains. It’s time for men to stand up in the face of technological progress and increasing wealth and say, not “Stop,” but “Wait.” Wait until we can evaluate the total effects of this change before we embrace it. Is the technically more advanced white bread really what we want to eat, in light of the nutritional needs of the body? Is that promotion and raise really worth uprooting my family once again?

Let me repeat again for emphasis: men need to *understand the times* so that they know what they ought to do.

Significant as it is, industrialism is not the only trend that has affected modern views of manhood, the family, and the roles of fathers. We will take a look, more briefly, at three other significant developments before we close this chapter.

THE GOVERNMENT AS FATHER

Paralleling the rapid progress of industry and technology has been the growth of the paternalistic state. Today the civil government (“the state”) has taken over most of the functions that used to be overseen by fathers in their homes.

Since the dawn of time families have provided the lion’s share of the care and nurture needed by human beings from cradle to grave — that is, until modern times. In the past, families brought children into the world and cared for the young. Parents taught their children to read and gave them the essential knowledge they needed to take their place as adults in society. Father and mother were adept at the healing arts and ministered health care to the sick among their family. Aged family members were cared for in the homes of their children or other relatives. Extended family members would take in widowed and orphaned relatives or see that their needs were met. The home was a child-care center, a school, a health provider, an old folks home, an orphanage — whatever it needed to be to care for its own.

The state has taken over more and more of these responsibilities. It began around 1840 when the states began to create the public schools and mandated the attendance of children through compulsory attendance statutes. This was a remarkable and profound cultural change. Whereas the father and mother had been the ones to indoctrinate their children, shape their character, and oversee their socialization, this task was now transferred to the state schools which proved to have a much different aim than what Christian parents had. The schools sought, and still do, to create the model citizen, one who can find his place in the modern economy, one who will be loyal to the values of socialism and tolerance or whatever the current doctrines of political correctness may be.

Since the Great Depression of the 1930s the taxpayer-financed welfare apparatus has grown enormously. All in the name of benevolence, several family functions have been usurped by the state. Most notable among these, and the most expensive, is the Social Security system which promises financial and medical care for the aged. What families used to do out of a sense of loving obligation, the state now does, poorly, through a program of coerced income transfer. It is similar with the programs that feed the poor and provide

support for single mothers with children. These “welfare” programs are a direct attack on fatherhood, not only since the state provides what a father ought, but because the father must be out of the home for the woman to qualify for support.

We could go on about government medical programs which are not only very costly to taxpayers but which also increasingly erode the liberty of families to make medical decisions. Or we could address how financing the welfare state has placed a huge economic burden on families, making it very difficult to get by on the father’s income alone, and forcing women into the workplace. But we would quickly get beyond the scope of our present concern.

One final example of the state’s usurpation of family duties deserves mention, however, since it is such a direct attack on parental sovereignty over children. Alan Carlson, of the pro-family The Howard Center for Family, Religion, and Society, in a speech some years ago, addressed the doctrine of *parens patriae*, or “the parenthood of the state,” which first made its appearance around 1840. He said,

Twisting ancient English chancery law to a new purpose, a Pennsylvania court used the term to justify the seizure and incarceration of children, over the protests of families, when the natural parents were deemed “unequal to the task of education or unworthy of it.” Reform schools, the “child saving” movement, the juvenile justice system, and the vast child abuse and neglect apparatus, all built on the *parens patriae*, representing as it did the family’s surrender of its protective function to the state.

This legal perversion has been developed to the point where today an anonymous call to a “child-abuse hotline” can result in parents losing custody of their children without any legal process whatsoever.

So the state has become the father to the nation, and men have allowed it. We can’t just blame the politicians and judges, though they deserve blame. Fathers by the millions have been passive in the face of the ongoing assault against their families. Someone has called it “responsibility drift.” Men have been glad to relieve themselves of some of the burdens of fatherhood, and the state has been only too happy to take them over.

IDEOLOGIES VS. MANHOOD

So far we have been addressing social and political factors that have restructured our society in ways detrimental to fathers and families. We should also take note of the influence of ideas: the philosophical attack on the family.

Christian thought dominated the West from the time of the Roman Empire to the Renaissance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. At that time a revival of interest in the ancient wisdom of the pagan Greeks began to lay the groundwork for what in time came to be called “humanism.” By the late eighteenth century philosophers were boldly denouncing the Christian concept of God, and the “Age of Enlightenment” enshrined the notion that man is the measure of all things. Despite the powerful and lingering influences of the Reformation, the God of the Bible came to be regarded, among

the intelligentsia, as an embarrassing relic to be discarded. God as the Father who personally cares for his creatures and personally punishes sin was set aside in favor of an impersonal god who made no ethical demands. Eventually, even this idol was abandoned in favor of a materialistic and evolutionary interpretation of reality.

With the loss of both God the Father and of his authoritative Word as the standard by which to order all of life, Western society lost the foundation that had underlain the patriarchal social system, which no longer had a theoretical basis for its existence. Without the solid ground of revealed truth as a foundation for belief and for social organization, Western culture began to substitute what have come to be called ideologies.

My dictionary defines “ideology” as “visionary theorizing.” These theories generally have to do with the vision of remaking human life and culture according to whatever pattern the theory espouses. Western civilization has been driven by anti-Christian visionary theories that are antithetical to Scripture and which, in particular, are very unfriendly to the God of the Bible and to biblical manhood. Yet one common characteristic of ideologies is that they are notoriously pushy. They do not tolerate opposition in their drive to remake society in their image.

One humanistic ideology that has grown dominant in the last century or so is that of egalitarianism, known more commonly by its most visible and vocal manifestation, feminism. Egalitarianism is a perversion of the sound idea that “all men are created equal,” — sound, that is, as long as you understand this to mean that everyone should be treated equally before the law. In other words, no favoritism. However, this notion has been twisted to mean that all people should be regarded as equal in every way, and differences should be eliminated, as far as possible.

Feminism says that women are equal to men. That, of course, is true in regard to the inherent worth and dignity of the person and the equally important roles both play in society. That is a biblical idea. However, feminism teaches something very different. It denies the propriety of role differences between the genders and the order of authority that God has established for home and society, and at this point it is in radical rebellion against God, his creation, and his revealed will in the Bible.

Many of the political battles of the last century have involved applications of this ideology, including the unsuccessful drive to pass the “Equal Rights Amendment” and the more recent successful effort to force women into the previously all-male Virginia Military Institute. This philosophy has been a huge blow to biblical manhood and the family. It provides a theoretical basis for denying the man’s leadership role in home and society, and it encourages women to abandon their God-given, home-centered calling. The effects have been devastating to family life in the societies where this anti-Christian message prevails. Feminism is a direct assault on the Bible and the God of the Bible, and it has been relentlessly molding this society toward its utopian vision.

Some of you may wonder if I’m not still fighting old battles as I address the dangers of feminism. After all, the heyday of feminism seems to have passed with the failure of the states to ratify the ERA about 25 years ago. But what you

need to see is that, while the political agitation in its favor may have subsided, the philosophy of egalitarianism has won the battle for our culture. With or without the ERA, *feminism has triumphed*. It's assumptions have become the assumptions of our whole society, including Christians, who have been passive before its advances, if not downright accommodating.

I was cast into a major depression the day I saw an article in a leading Christian men's magazine (the one most read by the kind of men who identify with Promise Keepers) with the title, "Why We Need Feminism." How did the author speak about this anti-Christian, man-hating movement?

Christians need feminism... I want to argue that feminism is more right than wrong. In fact, I think feminism is fundamentally a Christian idea....

[The author's future wife] didn't call herself a feminist, and we rarely discussed the topic. But what seemed so obvious — so logical — to us was that God had given us each a vocation. That we would be equal partners in sustaining a household....

Modern feminism has Christian roots. Begun in the mid-19th century in America by seminary-trained Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Quaker Susan B. Anthony....

I think Jesus was a feminist... And so modern feminism can be seen as a work of restoration, continuing the revolution started by Jesus... In many ways, feminism is simply Christian common sense. (Michael G. Maudlin, *New Man*, Nov/Dec 1997)

Excuse me while I get agitated. What hope is there for the Christian men's movement when feminist propaganda passes editorial muster at one of its principal publications?

A couple of verse come to mind: "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind." (Eph. 4:17) "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2) If there is to be any hope of lasting fruit from the men's movement, Christian men need to purge their minds of the futility of the feminist lie, and they need to renew their minds by grounding their view of the world in the Bible alone.

This problem of accommodation and compromise in the face of evil brings me to a final factor that has influenced the modern notions of family, manhood, and fatherhood.

FEMINIZED CHURCHES AND DOCTRINES

The churches should have been a refuge for Christian fathers seeking guidance and solace in the face of all the challenges to biblical manhood and the family that we have addressed so far. Sad to say, they have failed in that task. Actually, if we are to be honest, they are a large part of the problem.

First, instead of standing up and challenging the direction modern society has taken, *the church has acquiesced to the culture at every turn*. In the liberal denominations this has taken the form of accommodating feminism and embracing whatever new idea the God-haters have come up with, to the point where they are now in the process of embracing

practicing sodomites and considering them for the ministry, instead of calling them to repentance and offering them the forgiveness of God and his grace to live a new life. The mainline churches have simply followed the cultural drift, accepting the ideology *du jour* with fawning gusto.

Sadly, the evangelical churches have also largely failed to recognize and address the destructive trends of Western culture. In their case it is mostly the result of a faulty theology which teaches that Christians should not bother engaging the culture. This attitude has been rooted in an understanding of Scripture that truncates the application of the gospel: the gospel is about "spiritual" things, not earthly matters like schooling, politics, and business. This has then been reinforced by a pervasive tendency to think that it's no use getting exercised about such things since Jesus could come back at any time.

Ironically, both liberal and evangelical churches have taken a passive, we might even say feminine, posture toward the culture: allowing the culture to act upon the church rather than the church acting upon the culture. The church is supposed to be feminine in relationship to God, but masculine with reference to the world. Christians should take a more aggressive posture toward culture, the kind suggested by the words of the apostle Paul: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." (1 Cor. 10:3-5) Rather than taking thoughts captive for Christ, Christians have allowed their own thoughts to be taken captive by the humanistic philosophies and ideologies of the modern world.

The second way the church has been part of the problem instead of the solution in the cultural drift is that *it has largely abandoned the virile doctrines of the early church and the Reformation*. Instead of the Bible's masculine *doctrine of salvation* in which an initiating God acts with efficacious love to subdue his chosen to himself, much of the church now proclaims a passive God who offers his love but would not think of imposing his love on his bride. The pallid Jesus stands at the door and knocks, hoping we'll let him in. God is no longer presented as the very archetype of masculine power and love. This kind of feminized doctrine has contributed to the proliferation of feminized men who stand fearful even before their wives. If God is feminized, what chance do Christian men have?

The church has also become largely *antinomian* (a word which means "against law"), and this has contributed to its ineffectiveness in addressing issues of morality and social order. Christians today are scared to death of the law of God. After all, didn't Jesus set us free from the law? Of course he did: we are no longer condemned by the law. Praise God! But the moral law of God is binding on all men at all times, and the Christian rejoices in the law of liberty (Jas. 1:25) which shows him how to please God. He understands that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:16,17) In short, the Christian man loves the law (the word) of God, meditating on it day and night (Ps. 1:2). Those who don't think God's revealed will (his word, his

law) applies to them are not inclined to conform their lives to the patterns of this law, and they are likely to accommodate themselves to the winds of cultural change, however lawless.

A final destructive doctrine of the modern church which has especially hindered its ability to respond to the dissolution of the family is its *individualism*. The Bible teaches the solidarity of the human race in Adam, and of the elect in Christ. It teaches a solidarity of family, in which fathers are tied to their children and their children's children. The Bible's view of life is covenantal: God works with groups of people, not just with individuals, as he accomplishes his purposes in history. He deals with families, with churches, and with nations. God saves individually, but not apart from a consideration of the family of which the person is a part. "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them." (Ps. 103:17,18) God works through families as families, not just through individuals. The loss of this vision of life has diminished the significance of the family in the minds of Christian men and made it more difficult for them to stand against the modern assaults on the family.

TAKING 'OLD PATHS' INTO THE FUTURE

Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'" (Jer. 6:16)

When a people who used to walk in wisdom go astray to their hurt, the smart thing for them to do is to return to the old paths so that they can find rest once again. As a culture, we used to do the family thing right, but over the last few generations we have lost our way to the point that we won't even survive as a culture given our current course. It makes sense to get back to the ways that worked. It makes sense to get back to biblical patriarchy.

Unfortunately it is likely that most men will reject this call, even among Christians. There is a strong inertia that will hold

men back, and that force is another ideology of the modern world. It is the absolute conviction that new is better than old. This is a logical corollary to the doctrine of evolution: everything is improving over time. So what could the past possibly have to teach us?

Add to that the visceral reaction against the word "patriarchy" among those indoctrinated by feminism, and the crowd thins even more. But we use this term for several very sound reasons (cf. "'Patriarchy': A Good Word for a Hopeful Trend" in issue 23 of *Patriarch*), one of which is that it identifies the ideological battle of our day and forces a choice upon the person who hears the term: feminism or patriarchy? You can't live in both worlds.

Many men will say of the old path, "We will not walk in it." But that needn't stop you and me. Let's adopt the attitude expressed by Job:

For inquire, please, of the former age, and consider the things discovered by their fathers; for we were born yesterday, and know nothing, because our days on earth are a shadow. Will they not teach you and tell you, and utter words from their heart? (Job 8:8-10)

We need the humility to realize that we don't know very much at all. We need to learn from the past, from our forefathers, who will still speak to us from their hearts if we will just listen.

Even if the crowd doesn't follow, even if the larger culture continues its path toward destruction, you can do it right in your home. You don't control the world, but, by God's design, you do control your own choices and your own household.

Doing it right starts with understanding what you have done wrong, and a large part of that is simply a matter of understanding the times in which you live. We've all been led astray, but we can get back on course.

Let's set our eyes on the future because that is where we and our children are going to live. But as we do, let's learn the lessons of the past so that we understand the times in which we live today.

Let's take the "old paths" into the future. ✚