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The Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy

Vision Forum Ministries Editorial Note:

From time to time, God in His providence, allows not only for the testing of his saints, but for divisions, schisms and heresies to arise, that from such, His Church will grow in maturity and purity of faith, doctrine and practice. It is in the context of such “testing times” that God’s people are often reminded to “open the lost book of the law,” and return to the ancient paths — the eternal, unchanging truths found within the pages of Holy Scripture.

Central to the crisis of this era is the systematic attack on the timeless truths of biblical patriarchy. This attack includes the movement to subvert the biblical model of the family, and redefine the very meaning of fatherhood and motherhood, masculinity, femininity, and the parent and child relationship. We emphasize the importance of biblical patriarchy, not because it is greater than other doctrines, but because it is being actively attacked by unbelievers and professing Christians alike. Egalitarian feminism is a false ideology that has bred false doctrine in the church and seduced many believers. In conscious opposition to feminism, egalitarianism, and the humanistic philosophies of the present time, the church should proclaim the Gospel centered doctrine of biblical patriarchy as an essential element of God’s ordained pattern for human relationships and institutions.

There have been public statements recently against “legalistic patriarchy” and “hegemonic patriarchy” which have convinced us of the need for this kind of summary statement. We are anxious that what we actually teach be understood.

By way of background, we want to emphasize that we affirm the historic creeds and confessions of the Christian church (e.g., Apostles Creed, Nicene Creed, London and Westminster Confession, etc.) and understand them to present a balanced view of our faith. The Christian faith centers on Jesus Christ and is grounded on the written word of God. These are the truly vital concerns of life.

Biblical patriarchy is just one theme in the Bible’s grand sweep of revelation, but it is a scriptural doctrine, and faithfulness to Christ requires that it be believed, taught, and lived. The following are a list of affirmations which describe the perspective of Doug Phillips of Vision Forum Ministries, Phil Lancaster of Patriarch magazine and R.C. Sproul, Jr., of the Highlands Study Center. This document, drafted by Phil Lancaster, with the advice and counsel of others, is offered in an attempt to clarify what we mean by “biblical patriarchy.” We view this as an accurate working document, and invite feedback from anyone as we attempt to improve this statement over time.

In what follows, the number of words devoted to a tenet does not necessarily indicate the relative importance of that topic, but may rather indicate our sense of how much explanation is necessary given how unfamiliar or disputable the topic may be. Here, then, are the Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy.

God as Masculine

1. God reveals Himself as masculine, not feminine. God is the eternal Father and the eternal Son, the Holy Spirit is also addressed as “He,” and Jesus Christ is a male. (Matt. 1:25; 28:19; Jn. 5:19; 16:13)

The Image of God and Gender Roles

2. Both man and woman are made in God's image (their human characteristics enable them to reflect His character) and they are both called to exercise dominion over the earth. They share an equal worth as persons before God in creation and redemption. The man is also the image and glory of God in terms of authority, while the woman is the glory of man. (Gen. 1:27-28; 1 Cor. 11:3,7; Eph. 5:28; 1 Pet. 3:7)
3. God ordained distinct gender roles for man and woman as part of the created order. Adam's headship over Eve was established at the beginning, before sin entered the world. (Gen. 2:18ff.; 3:9; 1 Cor. 11:3,7; 1 Tim. 2:12-13)
4. Although sin has distorted their relationship, God's order of authority for husbands and wives has not changed, and redemption enables them to make substantial progress in achieving God's ideal for their relationship. (Gen. 3:16; Eph. 5:22ff.)

The Authority of Fathers

5. A husband and father is the head of his household, a family leader, provider, and protector, with the authority and mandate to direct his household in paths of obedience to God. (Gen. 18:19; Eph. 6:4)
6. A man's authority in the home should be exercised with gentleness, grace, and love as a servant-leader, following the example of Jesus Christ. Leadership is a stewardship from God. (Ps. 103:13; Mal. 3:17; Matt. 11:29-30; Col. 3:21; 1 Pet. 3:7)
7. The authority of fathers is limited by the law of God and the lawful authority of church and state. Christian fathers cannot escape the jurisdiction of church and state and must be subject to both. (Rom. 13:1ff.; Eph. 5:21; 6:4; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 2:13ff.)

Family, Church, and State

8. Family, church, and state are parallel institutions, each with real but limited authority in its ordained sphere. As the keeper of the keys of Christ's kingdom, the church is the central and defining institution of history. As the primary social group, the family is the foundational institution of society. (Matt. 16:19; 18:18; Acts 4:19; 5:29; 25:11; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 2:13ff.; Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Tim. 3:15)
9. Every Christian father and family ought to be a submitted and committed part of a local church, subject to the authority and discipline of the church through its elders. (Heb. 10:24-25; 13:17)
10. The church is defined by its orthodox confession and faithful teaching of God's word; by the presence of the Holy Spirit; by the rule of qualified elders; by the biblical administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; by regular meetings for worship, instruction, breaking bread, and fellowship; and by the exercise of discipleship and discipline. (Gal. 1:8; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:1ff.; Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:20ff.; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 5)
11. Male leadership in the home carries over into the church: only men are permitted to hold the ruling office in the church. A God-honoring society will likewise prefer male leadership in civil and other spheres as an application of and support for God's order in the formative institutions of family and church. (1 Tim. 3:5)

Men & Women: Spheres of Dominion

12. While men are called to public spheres of dominion beyond the home, their dominion begins within the home, and a man's qualification to lead and ability to lead well in the public square is based upon his prior success in ruling his household. (Mal. 4:6; Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:5)
13. Since the woman was created as a helper to her husband, as the bearer of children, and as a "keeper at home," the God-ordained and proper sphere of dominion for a wife is the household and that which is connected with the home, although her domestic calling, as a representative of and helper to her husband, may well involve activity in the marketplace and larger community. (Gen. 2:18ff.; Prov. 31:10-31; Tit. 2:4-5)
14. While unmarried women may have more flexibility in applying the principle that women were created for a domestic calling, it is not the ordinary and fitting role of women to work alongside men as their functional equals in public spheres of dominion (industry, commerce, civil government, the

military, etc.). The exceptional circumstance (singleness) ought not redefine the ordinary, God-ordained social roles of men and women as created. (Gen. 2:18ff.; Josh. 1:14; Jdg. 4; Acts 16:14)

Procreation

15. God's command to "be fruitful and multiply" still applies to married couples, and He "seeks godly offspring." He is sovereign over the opening and closing of the womb. Children are a gift of God and it is a blessing to have many of them, if He so ordains. Christian parents are bound to look to Scripture as their authoritative guide concerning issues of procreation. They should welcome with thanksgiving the children God gives them. The failure of believers to reject the anti-life mindset of the age has resulted in the murder of possibly millions of unborn babies through the use of abortifacient birth control. (Gen. 1:28; 9:1; 29:31; 30:22; Ex. 20:13; 21:22-25; Ps. 127:3; 128:3-4; Is. 8:18; Mal. 2:15)

Education & training of children

16. Education is not a neutral enterprise. Christian parents must provide their children with a thoroughly Christian education, one that teaches the Bible and a biblical view of God and the world. Christians should not send their children to public schools since education is not a God-ordained function of civil government and since these schools are sub-Christian at best and anti-Christian at worst. (Deut. 4:9; 6:6-9; Rom. 13:3-5; Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:15)

17. Fathers are sovereign over the training of their children and, with their wives, are the children's chief teachers. Christian parents are bound to obey the command personally to walk beside and train their children. Any approach to Christian education ought to recognize and facilitate the role of fathers and mothers as the primary teachers of their children. (Deut. 4:9; 6:6ff.; Ps. 78:3-8; Prov. 1:8; Eph. 6:4;)

18. Educational methodology is not neutral. The Christian should build his educational methodology from the word of God and reject methodologies derived from humanism, evolutionism, and other unbiblical systems of thought. Biblical education is discipleship, a process designed to reach the heart. The aim is a transformed person who exhibits godly character and a trained mind, both of which arise from faith. The parents are crucial and ordinarily irreplaceable in this heart-level, relational process. (Deut. 6:5-7; Lk. 6:40; 1 Thess. 2:7-12; 2 Tim. 1:5; 2 Pet. 1:5-8)

19. Since the educational mandate belongs to parents and they are commanded personally to walk beside and train their children, they ought not to transfer responsibility for the educational process to others. However, they have the liberty to delegate components of that process. While they should exercise great caution and reserve in doing this, and the more so the less mature the child, it is prudent to take advantage of the diversity of gifts within the body of Christ and enjoy the help and support that comes with being part of a larger community with a common purpose. (1 Cor. 12:14ff.; Gal. 4:1,2; 6:2; Eph. 4:16)

20. The age-integrated communities of family and church are the God-ordained institutions for training and socialization and as such provide the preferred pattern for social life and educational endeavors. The modern preference for grouping children exclusively with their age mates for educational and social purposes is contrary to scriptural wisdom and example. (Deut. 29:10-11; 2 Chron. 20:13; Prov. 22:15 with 13:20; Joel 2:16; 1 Cor. 15:33)

21. The Bible presents a long-term, multi-generational vision of the progress of God's kingdom in the world. Christian parents need to adopt this perspective and be motivated by the generational promises of Scripture, and church shepherds need to promote this outlook within their flocks. By the grace of God, as fathers faithfully turn their hearts toward their sons and daughters and the youths respond in kind, the next generation will build upon the faith and improve upon the faithfulness of their parents. (Ps. 78:1-8; Is. 59:21; Mal. 4:6; Lk. 1:17; Gal. 6:9)

A father and his older children

22. Both sons and daughters are under the command of their fathers as long as they are under his roof or otherwise the recipients of his provision and protection. Fathers release sons from their jurisdiction to undertake a vocation, prepare a home, and take a wife. Until she is given in marriage, a daughter continues under her father's authority and protection. Even after leaving their father's house, children should honor their parents by seeking their counsel and blessing throughout their lives. (Gen. 28:1-2; Num. 30:3ff.; Deut. 22:21; Gal. 4:1,2; Eph. 6:2-3)

23. Fathers should oversee the process of a son or daughter seeking a spouse. While a father may find a wife for his son, sons are free to take initiative to seek and “take a wife.” A wise son will desire his parents’ involvement, counsel, and blessing in that process. Since daughters are “given in marriage” by their fathers, an obedient daughter will desire her father to guide the process of finding a husband, although the final approval of a husband belongs to her. Upon a Marriage taking place, a new household with new jurisdiction is established, separate from that of the father. (Gen. 24:1ff.; 25:20; 28:2; Ex. 2:21; Josh. 15:17; Jdg. 12:9; 1 Sam. 18:27; Jer. 29:6; 1 Cor. 7:38; Gen. 24:58)

The sufficiency & application of Scripture

24. Scripture is the believer’s sufficient guide for all of faith and practice, and Christians must believe and obey whatever it teaches and commands. The Bible provides the Christian — through precept, pattern and principle — all that is necessary to make wise decisions concerning the many ethically complex issues of life. (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3)

25. Fathers need to exercise discernment in the choices they make for their families and not simply drift with the cultural tide. Egalitarian feminism is an enemy of God and of biblical truth, but the need for care goes beyond this threat. The values of modern society are often at odds with those that accompany a biblical worldview. For example, fathers need self-consciously to resist the values of individualism at the expense of community, efficiency at the expense of relationships, and material well-being at the expense of spiritual progress. The world and the worldly church will cheer many choices that are detrimental to family sanctification. (Rom. 12:2; 1 Jn. 2:15)

26. While God’s truth is unchanging, the specific application of that truth may vary depending on facts and circumstances unique to each believer. Also, those who are further along in sanctification will see some issues more clearly than those who are less mature. For these reasons great charity must be maintained between believers who have differences of application, and liberty of application must be respected. However, an appeal to the doctrine of Christian liberty must never be used in an effort simply to avoid submitting to what Scripture plainly teaches. Believers should also bear in mind that things which are lawful may not be expedient if the goal is personal and family holiness. The biblical rule in judging behavior is charity toward others, strictness toward oneself. (Gal. 5:2-3 with Acts 16:3; Phil. 3:15; Rom. 12:10; 1 Cor. 1:10; 6:12; 9:27; 10:23; Gal. 5:13)

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