



THE MISSING FATHER

Children's Ministry International (CMI) was recently (April, 2006) invited to a mission's conference in Memphis at Riveroaks Presbyterian Church in Germantown. As part of the conference CMI went downtown to do a presentation in the inner city with a ministry called "Streets". Over 125 kids of elementary age participated, after the "Charley the Gospel Worm" lesson (a take-off of the "word-less" book color Gospel presentation) the teachers and helpers toured the new "Streets" ministry facility being built in the poorest neighborhood in Memphis (the third poorest zip code in the nation).

As we went from room to room in this magnificent new building that sports a gymnasium twice the size of any college-basketball court, I asked the founder and Executive Director of "Streets Ministry" what some of the challenges of ministering to the large projects right across the street from the new Streets' structure. Ken said that around 95% of the homes in the projects were headed by a single female usually the mother, grandmother or aunt of the children living there. "Where are the men?", I asked. I was told that sadly the government subsidies given to families promote single parent households and the generational cycle of government dependency is now firmly rooted in the inner city. There were very few male authorities that would mediate and socialize the behavior of children.

Ken continued by saying that by the age of 10 to 12 years old, young people had started dangerous habits of sexual promiscuity, drugs, gang-involvement and other life-style choices that would make their escape from generational poverty very difficult. Outward behavior in the home manifested itself in undisciplined behavior, early signs of emotional distress/depression and sometimes violent outbursts of anger--basically the uncontrolled adolescent that was headed to jail. The ministry was working with lots of kids to turn them to Christ and leading them to new behavior, but its extremely difficult.

Back in the 1960's when the first reports of the inner city break-down of families, typified by the absentee father were being identified, the statistic was only around 25% of the homes lacking a father. When this was pointed

out by Patrick Moynihan (eventually an advisor to Richard Nixon, Ambassador to the UN and from the 1980's democratic senator from New York until his death a few years ago) in one of the early reports, it was dismissed as racist. The long-term effects are now apparent in every city in America.

One might ask if the rest of the country far behind, as today rates of single parent households in the general population is now approaching 25%. What should the Christian response be?

I have written several articles in the past on "why the husband won't lead" in our Christian homes. Some of the main reasons cited are:

1. He never saw loving, Christian leadership growing up to serve as an example.

2. The feminist culture of today demeans the roles of men and the Christian community has been affected by it.

3. The phenomenon of "living together without commitment" has made serious inroads into mainstream American society. When it becomes too difficult at home one of the spouses can easily give-up and leave, when children are present the results are devastating. Serial marriages or relationships are more and more common outside the inner city.

4. Men are uncomfortable being leaders at home and will shy away from "women's roles" in disciplining/discipling children or even playing with them. Men have egos that make them want to feel confident and competent in what they are doing and they do not feel confident and competent in roles around the house. They will excel in the work place and retreat to the TV sofa at home, deferring to the wife and confining themselves to "traditional male roles" of taking out the trash, cooking outdoors, yard/car work, and only activities that they easily see other men doing and no more.

5. Because of unconfessed sexual sins of the husband from dating days to current behavior coupled with pornographic involvement on the internet or movie DVD the power of the living Word of God is greatly diminished. Unconfessed sins lead to retreat in pure living and leadership.

Recognizing the problem starts the process of recapturing the biblical model of Christian male leadership in the home. Simply to say that men need to be more authoritarian and patriarchal misses the point. As with any sin (not conforming to what God has set forth for right behavior) we must confess our unwillingness and inability to act on our own. In this struggle with the

powers of darkness we must recognize that we are at war with a mindset of apathy and unbelief. With proper biblical knowledge comes confession, with confession comes restoration, with restoration comes new behavior. The God of second, third, fourth and more chances never departs. We may retreat, but God will be ultimately victorious.

What can the church do? We must pray that God will break our hearts as we see the American family fall apart. Commitment in marriage must be a constant theme from the pulpit, from our Bible studies, accountability groups and lives. Coming alongside of those who have wandered off the narrow road of chastity, purity and commitment to spouse and family must be seen in loving church discipline and mentoring.

As our members see pastors and elders confessing their inadequacies and praying to our covenant keeping God for help and direction will provide many with motivation to do the same. The battle is real, the enemy is strong, pray that the victorious God of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David and Paul the Apostle will be real in our lives.

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