

Vision Forum, Patriarchy and Federal Husband: Part #2 – By: Joe Fleener¹

This article is the second in a series. Part one served as an introduction to the various groups which to some degree or another have similar teaching to that of Vision Forum. More importantly part one summarized the underlying theological world-view which is providing the foundation for much of this teaching – *Theonomy*. It was concluded that this theological world-view is a distortion of Biblical Theology and therefore provides a flawed foundation on which to build.

As was mentioned in part one, Dr. Greg Bahnsen and others who developed this *theonomistic* world-view in the '70's and '80's focused their attention on the political scene and their desire to reform civil government. One will be hard pressed to find much within their teaching on the family or church.

What we will see in this article is that those groups mentioned in part one, like Vision Forum, are starting with a *Theonomistic* world-view (which is already distorted) and distorting it even more by trying to apply the same or similar conclusions to the family and church.

To demonstrate this we will look at three subject matters which are very prominent in the teaching for Vision Forum and overlap into the teaching of the other groups identified in part one. These three subjects are 1) Homeschooling 2) Procreation and 3) Patriarchy/Federal Husband. I will conclude by making an observation regarding Vision Forum's "Integrated Church Model."

Each of these areas are significant, complicated and often have advocates on every side who are full of emotion and conviction. It is not the intention of this article to discuss all the ins and outs of each of these subjects nor draw conclusions on the Bible's teaching on these subjects. The purpose of this article is rather simple. What are the historical, exegetical, hermeneutical and theological arguments used by these groups to support their position on these subjects and are they Biblically valid?

I will close the article with a very brief look at Vision Forum's Family-Integrated Church model.

Homeschooling:

The following statement is taken from Vision Forum's website (emphasis mine):

...while many Christians have correctly focused on the religious nature of the content of education, they ignore the fact that the **Bible also speaks to the methodology of education**. Methods are not neutral. The rise of the home education movement is not merely a response to the failure of government education; it is an affirmation of a distinctively Biblical approach to both the methods and the objectives of Christian education.

Unlike the peer-driven culture of the classroom, with its **unbiblical approach to age segregation as a basis for training**, home educators benefit from the one-on-one tutorial approach which allows parents to walk alongside their children while communicating faith, virtue, and knowledge, in that order. **Home education, with its emphasis on relationship-driven training, is a**

¹ Joe is a husband and father of three. He completed his M.Div. at Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary in 2003 and is in the thesis stage of his Th.M. also from Calvary. He serves as part of [Grace Fellowship Church](#). He is an independent contractor currently doing development and training for [BibleWorks](#) along with training, systems development and teaching for [The Master's Academy International](#).

distinctively Hebrew approach to education, while the modern classroom, with its emphasis on efficiency, is a distinctively Greek and pagan approach to education.²

This quote makes several profound assertions. Does the Bible speak to the “method” of education? Is age segregation “unbiblical?” Is home education “distinctively Hebrew?” Is classroom instruction “distinctively Greek?”

It is no surprise that the primary passage used to support the first assertion regarding the Bible’s teaching on educational methodology is Deuteronomy 6:7-9. There is no question that God through Moses was instructing the Hebrew people in a methodology for instructing their children. But is that the purpose of this passage? The other source often referred to is Proverbs. Certainly Proverbs gives wonderful illustrations on various methods which can be employed when instructing our children, but were those methods uniquely Hebrew? I would like to suggest the answer to both of these questions is “no.”

When you back up to Deut. 6:4-6 it is clear that the focus in Deut. 6 is not the methodology of teaching and instruction, but the content. Verse 4 is the *shama*, the great statement of monotheism and worship the Jewish people repeated regularly. In the remaining portion of Deut. 6 God is instructing the people of Israel through Moses to be sure they have the truths of God in their own heart and then (and only then) endeavor to engrave them on the hearts of their children as they live out their lives together.

The methods identified in verse 7 – “when you sit and when you walk...when you lie down and when you rise up” – are not some kind of unique instruction to the Hebrews over and against the lifestyle of the pagan people around them. The pagan nations around them would have had very similar daily routines. The Ancient Near East was agricultural with multigenerational families living in close proximity to each other. This was not something unique to Israel. In the Ancient Near East young children would have been under the primary care of the mother. Once sons reached a certain age they would then go with their father to learn a trade, etc. This also was not unique to Israel. God simply gave His people instructions on the incredible importance of passing on Biblical truth to their children as they lived out their lives together. This is not a mandate for a particular form of education.

Proverbs is quite interesting. What we have in proverbs (among other things) is a glimpse inside the inner workings for a Royal Court. These inner workings as well were not unique to Israel. In fact there are proverbs of non-Israel origin contained within our book of Proverbs. Again the purpose is not to give us a culturally transcendent methodology of child education. These same methods would have been used by other cultures in the Ancient Near East. What would have been different would have been the content.

As for age segregation and classroom instruction being Greek and therefore pagan, this does not stand-up to the test of Scripture or history either. As stated above in the Ancient Near East, including the Hebrew homes, the sons would have left the home to go with their fathers at a certain age, therefore leading to age segregation even within the home for their further education and training. Secondly it was common in the Royal Courts of the Ancient Near East for the children to be segregated by age and even gender for particular aspects of their teaching and training. Finally, by the time we get to the New Testament period there were synagogue schools, where boys would have been taught and often in different environments based on age. It simply does not stand-up against historical reality to claim that home education is Hebrew and (by implication given by God) while age segregated education is Greek and therefore pagan.³

² Douglas W. Philips. “The Significance of Home Education to God’s Kingdom Work.” <http://www.visionforum.com/about/> (04 August 2005).

³ This lack of historical research seems to be an endemic problem for Vision Forum. In an email received from them they defined Gnosticism as “the belief that God is not concerned with physical things.” (Doug Philips, “The Public Undressing of

Procreation

The following statements are taken from Vision Forum Ministries' website:

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... (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)⁴

WHEREAS, God's Holy Word declares that the children of faithful Christians are a means of spreading the influence of the Church in society, of global discipleship and cultural dominion, and that the larger the population growth of Christians, the more effective will be our warfare against Satan...⁵

There is absolutely no question that Scripture clearly teaches the value of life and that of the life of an unborn child. Therefore the subject of abortion and related subjects will not be discussed in this article as this is not pertinent to the topic. We will focus on the question of whether God's command to Adam and Noah are binding on us today and the interesting assertions given in the second statement above.

There are two significant items that arise from these statements:

1. Is God's command to Adam in Genesis 1:28 still binding on us today?⁶ There is no question this is before the Fall. It would be rather easy to discount, except that it is repeated to Noah and his sons in Genesis 9:1. When drawing a conclusion on this matter the following biblical data ought to be considered:
 - a. The time after the flood was unique in human history, very similar to that of the time just after creation. There was an obvious need for being fruitful and filling the earth.
 - b. This command is never repeated again in all of Scripture.
 - c. Although there are many places in the Old Testament regarding God opening and closing the womb, most if not all of them are either in relation to God's chastisement and the release of that chastisement or directly related to His covenant relationship with Israel.
 - d. Both Jesus and Paul repeat the command from Genesis 2 regarding marriage, but no where in the New Testament is the subject of being fruitful, multiplying or the opening/closing of the womb addressed.

America." 26 July 2005. jfleener@digitalexegesis.com. I have yet to find a philosophical dictionary or encyclopedia defining Gnosticism in this way. At the very least it is extremely simplistic. After one reads and understands the historical complexity of Gnosticism it hard to understand how it relates to their email which was addressing modesty!

⁴ Douglas W. Philips. "Procreation." <http://www.visionforumministries.org/sections/home/doctrine/tenets.asp> (04 August 2005).

⁵ Douglas W. Philips. "Children as a Tool for Societal Influence, Discipleship, and Dominion." <http://www.visionforumministries.org/sections/home/doctrine/tenets.asp> (04 August 2005).

⁶ The question of whether God's command to Adam in Genesis 1:28 is still binding on us today is part the whole issue within historical Covenant Theology of the *prelapsarian* vs. *postlapsarian* (pre-Fall/post-Fall) covenant. We will not enter this debate expect to mention that *prelapsarianism*, is not a historical Calvinistic teaching. It dates to the late 1500's. See David A. Weir. *The Origins of Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* Oxford: Clarendon, 1990.

I do not pretend that these items close the book on this subject. I will suggest, however, that these observations must cause us to be less dogmatic on this subject than what you read and hear from the teachers of Vision Forum.

2. The second statement given above from Vision Forum Ministries' website is quite interesting. It reveals much of the underlying theological foundation that is driving their teaching on procreation. Behind their teaching on procreation is a *Theonomistic* postmillennial theology. They have brought not only the Law of Moses, but also commands to Adam and Noah into our day to support their teaching on procreation. This teaching is really motivated by a desire to fill the Earth with covenant children so as to usher in the Kingdom – postmillennialism – which is not the historical teaching on eschatology of even Covenant Theology.

Patriarchy/Federal Husband

The basic argument for patriarchy/federal husband goes as follows:

- 1) If Adam is the Federal head of the human race⁷ 2) and if Christ being the second Adam⁸ is the Head of the Church 3) and if husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the church⁹, 4) then husbands are the federal heads of their families.¹⁰

What do they mean by Federal Husband or Patriarch¹¹? It is interesting. Some, if not many, of the practical applications they make for the husband's role are quite good and even helpful. The husband is to lovingly lead his wife and children. The husband is in the position of final authority in the home. The husband's model for lovingly leading his wife is the model of Christ and His love for His bride, the church. There are many books and resources that teach this.

What is more telling is the theological and exegetical multipart conditional statement given above. As they lay out their Biblical defense for their teaching on Federal Husband and Patriarchy they are revealing their theological grid – it is rooted in *Theonomistic* teaching and Federal Theology. Ultimately their standard is not Christ. Their theological basis for the husband's role today is Adam's role as Federal Head of the human race.

There are some who will see this as a very smooth connection. They will teach that since Adam was Federally responsible for the sins of the entire human race, the husband, now in Adam's Federal position over his wife, is federally responsible for the sins of his wife.

Is this valid? The two passages they use to defend this view are 1 Timothy 2:11-14 and Ephesians 5:22-33. There is no question that Paul teaches in 1 Timothy 2:13 that Adam was formed before Eve and he uses this as part of his argument. There is also no question that Paul teaches in Ephesians 5:23ff that the husband is head of his wife. But what is Paul teaching in these two passages? Let's look at one at a time.

⁷ *Prelapsarian* federal theology and a result of protestant scholostisim not historical Biblical or even Covenant Theology.

⁸ Romans 5:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:22

⁹ Eph 5:22-33

¹⁰ At the very least this could be considered a "theology by implication."

¹¹ For a detailed look at the views of Vision Forum see, Brian M. Abshire. "Biblical Patriarchy and the Doctrine of Federal Representation." <http://www.visionforumministries.org/sections/hotcon/ht/family/patriarchyfederal.asp>. (05 August 2005). and "Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy." <http://www.visionforumministries.org/sections/home/doctrine/tenets.asp>. (05 August 2005). In addition see Douglas Wilson's two volumes *Reformed Marriage & Federal Husband*.

1 Timothy 2:11-14

The entire book of 1 Timothy is written to a pastor. Paul clearly states in 3:15 that he is writing to Timothy “so that you will know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God.”

In 2:11-14, Paul is not giving instruction on how a husband and wife ought to function in their home. Rather he is giving instructions on a woman’s role in the church. There is a difference, and they ought not to be equated. He is certainly not giving instruction on the Federal Headship of the husband in this passage or anywhere else in 1 Timothy.

Ephesians 5:22-33

It is here where Paul uses the word “head” to describe the position of the husband. The Greek word for this is *kephale* and is rich with history and meaning, much of which we will not be able to get into in this article. The question is Paul teaching this concept of Federal Headship here in Ephesians 5:22-33?

The following quote is a very helpful summary of what Paul is doing in Ephesians 5 (emphasis mine)¹²:

The section 5:21–6:9 addresses what we call “household codes.” In Paul’s day, many Romans were troubled by the spread of “religions from the East” (e.g., Isis worship, Judaism and Christianity), which they thought would undermine traditional Roman family values. Members of these minority religions often tried to show their support for those values by using a standard form of exhortations developed by philosophers from Aristotle on. These exhortations about how the head of a household should deal with members of his family usually break down into discussions of husband-wife, father-child and master-slave relationships. Paul borrows this form of discussion straight from standard Greco-Roman moral writing. **But unlike most ancient writers, Paul undermines the basic premise of these codes: the absolute authority of the male head of the house.**¹³

One could argue that Paul is addressing a concept or an idea related to Federal Headship in this passage. However, it is clear that his purpose is not to support it but rather to turn it on its head!

Paul is doing things that would never have been conceived of in the minds of his readers. He is taking a very common form of exhortation, “household code,” packing it full of truth, then directing it toward his readers in ways no writer in their day or before would have ever done.

1. He addresses the “inferior” party in each relationship first (wife before husband, child before parents, servant before master). In other household codes the “inferior” party would not have been addressed at all, certainly not first! By doing this, Paul is giving great dignity and respect to these individuals and their roles. The wife is not only addressed in the husband/wife relationship, but is included in the parent/child relationship in chapter 6, something that would have been unheard of in Paul’s day.
2. No where in the book of Ephesians does Paul discuss Adam’s role related to Eve or humanity. His point of reference here for the husband’s role and the husband’s leadership is Christ, not Adam.

¹² See also, Timothy G. Gombis. “A Radical New Humanity: The Function of the *Haustafel* in Ephesians.” *JETS* Vol 48. No. 2 (June 2005).

¹³Keener, Craig S., and InterVarsity Press. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*, Eph 5:20. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

For someone to claim that Paul's use of the word "head" here is directly related to the theology of Federal Headship is implication at the very least – it is certainly not derived exegetically from the text itself.

3. It is clear that Paul is presenting a picture of loving, servant leadership in the home. Leadership yes – God has certainly called husbands to lead their wife and children. But the standard is Christ's loving, servant leadership, not Adam's positional role over Eve or humanity.

Family-Integrated Church

I know there are some who are seeing and even being affected by Vision Forum's Family-Integrated Church model. I am convinced that this model, in and of itself is not the problem. The problem is much more serious and much more significant. The fact is anyone who claims there is only one way to "do church" when discussing weakly services, etc. is committing an exegetical, historical and hermeneutical fallacy.

For Vision Forum, their church model is not inherently wrong. Their family model is based on a distorted theology which has naturally lead them to distorted, dogmatic teaching on the church.

Rather than spending a lot of time dealing with a symptom (their church model), I have spent the time to address the real disease – an unbiblical theology of the family.

Conclusion

To reiterate how I opened the first article in this series. I have spent the time to investigate these groups and write on this subject as a husband and a father. I am committed to my role and truly desire to please my Lord in how I fulfill the responsibilities of these roles.

However, I am more committed to the truth and so am unwilling to compromise the truth of God's Word – even for something that is presented in such an attractive and admirable package.

Vision Forum and these other groups are presenting something that all Godly husbands and fathers want – a solid biblical home functioning as God has designed, based on God's morals.

It seems to be a beautiful house, but once you open the door and go inside you realize it is built on a distorted and theologically weak foundation; you see the floor joists and wall studs are not as strong as they appeared on the outside; you see the paint is starting to peel and there is no indoor plumbing.

Not a house I want to live in.

Psalm 127:1 "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it."

Let us not be deceived by a nice package. Let us strive, work, sweat and bleed over building a family that is built on a solid foundation.

Sources:

Bahnsen, Greg L. *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1984.

Barker, William S. and Robert Godfrey. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.

Beale, G. K. *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.

Elazar, Daniel J. and John Kincaid eds. *The Covenant Connection: From Federal Theology to Modern Federalism* Oxford: Lexington Books, 2000.

Kruse, Colin G. *Paul, the Law, and Justification*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997.

Jordan, James B. "Calvanism and 'The Judicial Law of Moses'." *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction, Symposium on Puritanism and Law* Vol. V No. 2 (Winter 1978-79): 17-48.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *The Fulfillment of the Law*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993.

Thielman, Frank. *The Law and The New Testament: the Question of Continuity* New York: Crossroad, 1999.

Weir, David A. *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* Oxford: Clarendon, 1990.

Wilson, Douglas. *Federal Husband* Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 1999.

Wilson, Douglas. *Reforming Marriage* Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 1995.