

Family vs. Church

• A few years ago, I was given a recorded sermon entitled, “How Some Churches Are Hurting Families.” This sermon had been circulated in a church pastored by a friend of mine. It caused great division and difficulty.

The speaker alleged that it was wrong for anyone to teach the children other than the father; that Sunday School was improper; that youth activities were unscriptural, and that anything that caused the family to be divided while at a church service or other function was unscriptural.

His point was that since some young people had been harmed by the example and testimony of others at church, every effort should be made to see that the young people were always under the direct and immediate vision and control of the parents. (I thought of preaching a sermon on “How Some Families are Hurting Children.” All of us know of terrible abuses perpetrated against children . . . by their parents! This is certainly no argument for the government or some other entity to be given the responsibility to rear the children. The answer instead is to deal with those who do wrong.)



Dr. R. B. Ouellette

• Some parents have been encouraged to take vows that the children will never be out of sight of at least one of the parents. These families never employ a babysitter. Mom and Dad can never go out for an evening alone. The family cannot engage in any ministry which would not permit all the siblings from infancy on up and the parents to be all involved together at the same time.

• Some parents are refusing to send their children to Sunday School, requiring that they sit with them in an adult class or, in some cases, that the father be given a room in the church where he can teach his own children.
• Some churches, following this model, have a significant portion of the service devoted to families sharing their experiences of the previous week. In some cases, explicit details are told about the misbehavior and subsequent discipline of a particular child – in their presence.

• Some families try to keep their children completely isolated from any other part of society. Their children never go to the home of another child; other children never come to their homes, unless accompanied by their parents; their children never attend camp; never go to a youth rally or a youth revival or a youth conference.

Now, much of this is done by sincere people who genuinely want the best for their children. However, it becomes, for some of them, a crusade. Dr. Paul Chappell told of having a family visit his church and asking him, “Is your church family-friendly?” Suspecting where they were coming from, he replied by asking, “Is your family local church-friendly?”

I asked a pastor friend of mine who knows Bro. Bill Gothard well, “Is Bill Gothard really against the church, or is it just his followers taking what he says to an extreme?” This good man did not answer my question directly. He kindly replied, “Well, Bill is a friend. I talked to him about this matter for several hours recently.” Here are a few thoughts about this subject.

The family is God’s first and most important institution. There was a time in the history of the human race when there was no church. There was a time in the history of God’s people when there was no Temple. But there never was a time there was no family. God brought a man and a woman together in the Garden of Eden and charged them with the responsibility of bringing children into the world.

• The family is the primary source of authority in the life of their children.
• The family should be the primary source of the Gospel in the lives of their children.
• The family should be the primary source of training in the lives of their children. I have regularly reminded the dear people of the First Baptist Church of Bridgeport that Christian Schools and youth programs and the Sunday School are to be a supplement to the teaching and training provided in the home, not a substitute.

The local church should respect the particular values and beliefs of individual families. We have had families in

our church who wish to home school rather than place their children in our Christian school. I not only accept, but I encourage this. We offer whatever services we can to the family. If they would like to have their children come to our Chapel programs, play in our sports programs, or attend some of our special activities at Bridgeport Baptist Academy, they are welcome to do so. If they would like for us to assist in ordering textbooks or if, for the purpose of some “umbrella of protection,” they desire for us to administer tests to the children, we permit that. God did not give our members children so that the Bridgeport Baptist Academy could have students; He gave First Baptist Church of Bridgeport the Bridgeport Baptist Academy to help those parents who desired Christian education for their children.

We have had some parents who were reluctant to send their children to camp. We respect their decision. We have had some parents who did not like their children participating in particular youth activities and again, we supported the parents.

All families should be involved in a local, independent, fundamental, Bible-believing, New Testament, separated, soulwinning Baptist church. It has well been said that an individual cannot be right with God and wrong with the church. We are commanded to not forsake “the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but [exhort] one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25)