

“Ousting the Child CEO” Deuteronomy 6:4-9 Ephesians 5:1-2, 25, 6:1-3

Our nation has been rocked by a number of corporate scandals in the recent past. Enron, Worldcom, and Healthsouth are among the corporations that have had their Chief Executive Officers and other top officials indicted for various illegal activities that have caused their companies to lose millions of dollars. Just this week the Chief Financial Officer of Enron has been testifying in the trial of Ken Lay, the CEO.

Even though these corporate scandals have been big news, there is another corporate scandal that is much more serious and which affects many families. This scandal in the family corporation is that children have been allowed to take over as the Chief Executive Officers, the CEO's, of the families. Far too often, we parents have allowed this to happen. We have moved out of the corner office, we have given up the perks, and we have let the children run the show, set the agenda, and enjoy all the benefits of leading the family.

After getting married and after having a child or two, a man and woman may tender their resignations. The wife resigns from her number one responsibility, that of being a wife, and immerses her life in the lives of her children. The husband resigns from his number one role, being a husband, and either seeks to be the most indulgent Dad ever, or he becomes a career chaser. Trying to succeed and make a lot of money, he wants to give his family all the stuff they want, all the things that he thinks will make them all

happy. Because of these resignations, marital drift takes place, and a chasm develops between the husband and wife. No one knows what the mission statement of the family is all about. No one knows who is really leading the show. Too much of the family life revolves around the children, and the marriage is put on a back burner with the heat turned off.

I'm not much of a sociologist, and I don't claim to know all the reasons why we have allowed children to become the CEO's. However, we have certainly been guilty of much permissive parenting in the last generation or two. We've been told that we need to reason with our children, that we need for the family to be more democratic, that we need to be careful not to crush the children's egos, their identities, and their creativity.

The problem is that permissive parenting does not work well. It is certainly not the biblical model of family life. Children are not made to run the show, and when we allow a child to be the CEO of the family, it messes everything up. In reality, the marriage is the most important thing in the family. The very best thing that you can do as a parent, for your family as a whole, and for your children in particular, is to have an awesome marriage. The best gift you will ever give your children is to have the best marriage that you possibly can. The marriage is the nucleus, the juice, the essence of the family corporation.

As we talk about children running the family, you may think that you see this problem worse in some other family. Or you may not have any children living at home anymore. Regardless of your situation, I ask you to

be honest about your own situation and to consider how we all can work best to oust the children from being the family CEO.

If you have a child CEO in your family, you, as the parent, and hopefully, the two of you as husband and wife, need to do a hostile takeover. You need to tell your child or your children to clean out the corner office and to move to their rightful position. A hostile takeover may sound harsh, but it is not. We need to get in line with God's organizational chart of the family, and when we do, it will be the very best thing for every person in the family.

If I know anything at all about God, I know that God is not a God of chaos. Creation is all about bringing order out of chaos, and everything God has done in creating humankind and relating to us is orderly. There is organization and there is authority in God's plans.

We can get a good idea of God's organizational plan for the family by looking at the Book of Ephesians. This outline is found in chapters five and six. God is at the top of the organizational chart. Ephesians 5:1 says, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children." God is God, and you and I are not God. This knowledge is fundamental and so important. Without beginning with God at the top our organization is bound to be in trouble.

The next step in the organizational chart can be found in Ephesians 5:25. It says, "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her." With God at the top, the marriage comes second, and then we find the children. Ephesians 6:1 says, "Children obey

your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” The authority runs down the flow chart. Children are under the authority of their parents, who are under the authority of God. When the flow gets reversed or messed up in any way, the family is in trouble.

The biblical goal of parenting is the process of teaching and training your children to leave. That’s parenting: to teach and train your children to become independent adults who can move on and establish their own family units. The teaching is set forth in Deuteronomy 6, “These words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” The training part is covered in Proverbs 22:6, which says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Hence, we need to train our children to go, because if we don’t, then Mom and Dad will wind up going.

If you believe that a child or the children are calling the shots in your family, you may be wondering what to do. Demote the children. Do a hostile takeover. Put the child or the children in their rightful place. This isn’t harsh; it is doing what is best for children as well as for the whole family. Don’t think that you have to give the children your undivided attention 24/7. There is such a thing as smothering; it happens when parents devote too much time and attention to their children. It isn’t healthy for anyone.

Another thing that parents need to do which goes along with demoting the children is that parents need to set the agenda. Don't wait for the child to set his or her own schedule. Parents are to be leaders; leaders set the agenda. For example, does a school child need to have a regular bedtime set for him or her? I think so. Furthermore, the bedtime isn't an issue that is up for discussion, vote, or majority rule. The child who has to get up at 6:30 to go to school might like to stay up until midnight, but that isn't a good idea. Parents know this, and parents must set the agenda.

Everyone is not equal in the family. We are all equal before God, in the sense that God loves every person just as much as the other, but equality in input and decision making in a family will lead to more chaos than order. You young people, who are living with your parents, please understand that your parents are in authority over you, and that is the way God intended it to be. If you do not follow their agenda, then you are being disobedient to your parents and disobedient to God. Children need structure, and children need discipline. The structure and the discipline need to be consistent. Too much permissiveness simply is not good for any child.

Another action to take in ousting your child from the CEO chair is to limit the company perks. Children should not get all the best benefits that normally go to the leaders in a group. This really does sound kind of mean and authoritarian, doesn't it. After all, what do we parents always say? Don't we always say that we want the best for our children? Of course we do. What is the very best that we can offer our children? Is it not to offer

them an opportunity to know God through Jesus Christ, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God, having the very mind and spirit of Christ to be formed in them? In practice, many of us do something very different. We allow and even push our children to get involved in so many extra curricular activities that may not be of much benefit for the formation of Christian character in children. I'm not against children playing sports, or taking dance or music lessons, or riding horses, or showing livestock. All these things can be good, but when they come up against your involvement in church, there is a problem. In being involved in the Upward program, we wanted to provide an atmosphere where competition would be played down, teamwork would be accentuated, and an emphasis on spiritual growth would be added.

Both in terms of setting the agenda for your children and limiting the company perks, I need to say here that children should not be given the decision of whether or not they are going to come to church, to the children's programs, and the youth group. You parents must lead, and you are not being mean by telling your child that he or she will be involved in the church activities for him or her. You are seeking the best for your children in this way.

When a young person is facing the temptations of this world, will they rely on the lessons they learned in dance class or Sunday School? Will their discussions in youth group or on the soccer field give them guidance in how to choose wisely?

Children need balance in their lives, and some extra curricular activities are fine. You parents, however, need to be sure that you are not forcing your child into some activity so that you can live vicariously through the child. Furthermore, very few of our children will make a living playing baseball, singing, or dancing.

Finally, parents need to nurture client relations. Any good business person knows that clients have to be looked after. As I said earlier, nothing will be better for your children than for their parents to have a great marriage. Therefore, husband and wife have to work on their relationship. You need time alone, you need to go on regular dates, if you will. If you don't look after your marriage, it will weaken, and a poor marriage is tough on the children. This makes spiritual sense as well; remember that husband and wife are to be covenant keepers with each other. Every husband and every wife needs to take time to spend with their spouse. Such time is not taken away from your children; it will benefit them in the long run.

Children need to be children, under the authority of their parents, and not the CEO's of the family. Parents need to be leaders of the family, while seeing their roles as under the authority of God. With this organizational chart at work everyone wins, for we are more fully living in the will of God. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.