

Genesis 1:26-28 | Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 1:26-28 | The Christian Home

Last summer we moved through a series on Marriage, titled The Marriage Series. Well it seemed appropriate to move along with this theme by looking at what marriage practically accomplishes, the formation of a Christian home. In this series I intend to provide a vision around the Christian home, parenting, and children. I hope to provide practical insight into your role as a parent and your responsibilities as children. Likewise I hope you catch a vision for what your family means to God. You’ll see that the family is not just a cultural institution you happen to be a part of, but is the very object of God’s promises.

Families are becoming more rare than ever. Strange thing to say of course because everyone you know comes from one. (If 100% of people have one then it seems like the rate’s holding). But birthrates are the lowest they’ve ever been worldwide. The only liberal democracy in the world with a birthrate at or above replacement is Israel, and this is largely inflated because of a deeply religious minority within that nation. But its not just the liberal democracies the same trend of below replacement birthrates is taking place in China and Russia. The population in China shrunk this year for the first time since the great famine. To quote Kevin DeYoung, “The human race seems to have grown tired of itself.” Modern industrialized nations can make a lot of things, but people isn’t one of them.

There are of course a myriad of correlating factors for this decline. But I like philosophy, and to a man with a hammer. When we look at a marxist country like China, it feels like an easy story to tell. Marx was explicit in his desire to transcend/abolish the family relation as the center of societal and economic life. Marx remember is a pure materialist. He views the family not as a natural or God ordained relationship, but rather as a financial mechanism in which the man subjugates the woman to perform labor guaranteeing offspring who can preserve capital for the bourgeois by means of inheritance. The wife and children are the first slaves of the husband. The family is the template of economic exploitation. So to Marx, the family exists as a solution to an economic problem of scarcity, but it is an exploitative solution which ought to be transcended by a more just societal structure.

But liberal democracies like ours are not communist. We do not have the destruction of the family in our founding documents. But we must recognize that the liberalism imagined by the early moderns, who we do have in our founding documents, carry within them an assumption which precedes and was taken up by the marxists. This assumption is the perfect freedom of the individual. We in liberal societies are able to immediately resonate with the wrongness of one person subjugating another because we share the same conception of human freedom. While we play it out differently, both societies conceive of the individual as occupying a natural state of perfect freedom in which the unencumbered will of the individual must be preserved, and all bonds of relationship are downstream of consent. This is why our conception of rights is about protecting the individuals unencumbered will from non-consensual impositions.

We can see the implication of this view play out in liberal societies because we are unable to maintain the rights of the non-autonomous, namely the unborn, the elderly, or especially those who will remain dependent through the whole of their lives. It is perfectly reasonable in our culture to test a child in utero for conditions which might curtail their autonomous self-possession and then destroy them. This is reasonable because the fundamental conception of the individual is a self-possessed, unencumbered, autonomous will. If this is our understanding of what it means to be a person, than at a deep spiritual level, before any evidence of birthrate decline, we have already eliminated the reality of the family because the family is a non-consensual duty bound relationship, and this relationship constitutes the individual.

Every individual is constitutively familial. We are born receiving, dependent, and duty bound. You did not consent to this. But that's not because your familial constitution is tyrannical, its because its a gift of love. I've wanted to begin this series by demonstrating that our fundamental assumptions about what it means to be a free human undermines our ability to participate in the reality of family. The consistent economic and social attacks on the natural family are the necessary implications of these assumptions. Even at the level of our own hearts, this assumption of self-actualization through unencumbered autonomy, has rendered us unable to fully participate in the duty bound dependent glory of our own families.

1. Made Dependent and Duty Bound

Genesis 1:26 | Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

It was typical of the early moderns, Locke, Rousseau, Hobbes, to tell a story of man in an original state from which they would describe the development of society. But the original state of man is in one sense prior to his existence. The thing which man depends upon for his existence is the loving intention of God to create man in his image and likeness. We cannot understand what it means to be a person if we don't first recognize that we are creatures, not made by ourselves or for ourselves, but made by God and for God. The first

man is not autonomous, or independent. In the original state of humanity we are fundamentally dependent and duty bound. Adam is created by God and receives the gift of life and existence from God, he is duty bound to love and honor God as his creator and provider. His life is not unencumbered but properly constrained. There is no Adam apart from his dependent relationship to his creator.

Adam is created to be dependent. He cannot manifest for himself those things which are necessary for his life and survival. Adam cannot make food for himself. But God had in fact already made these things for him as he gives him access to the fruit of all the trees of the garden. Adam cannot determine his own purpose, this is given to him from his father, as he is instructed to take dominion over the whole world. Adam did nothing to receive these benefits of existence. Adam did nothing to earn his unique sonship to God or his unique duties before him.

Why did God make Adam in this way? Why not create a neutral creature who could opt into relationship with God if he wanted? Well one reason we might consider is because he was made like God, God made man in his image and likeness. And God made him in love. God is love, and within God's love is a fatherly love for the son and the Son's love and honoring of the Father. Because God is three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When he makes him in his image, he makes him a creature designed to receive fatherly love and to respond in love toward the father as a son. This is the fundamental reality of what it means to be a person, is to be a creature who did not create themselves but receives as a gift a relationship of love who owes love in return.

2. Born Dependent and Duty Bound

Genesis 1:28 | And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

But God's intention for the love that he showed Adam in his creation is that Adam might likewise increase the love in the world by being fruitful with his wife Eve. (There is much more to say about this, and the creation of Eve. But for that you should look at the Marriage series which explores in the first sermon the creation of marriage). God love glory, so he makes things glorious and then he makes things more glorious.

This dominion mandate describes the natural position of humanity. We are born of fruitfulness in obedience to God's blessing. When Adam and Eve are fruitful and multiply, they have children. Now consider what their children are like. They are not born autonomous deciding whether or not to opt into relationship with their mother and father. Instead they are born in a position of dependence receiving of life as a gift. Eve provides food for her child by nursing him. The Child receives it in love. The Child in return loves

their mother and father with the love he has received from them. The family he is born into is just as much of a gift as the life he has received from them. Adam instructed Eve about his God and Adam and Eve together would teach the child about their God, his generosity towards them, the restrictions he had placed on them regarding that one tree. The responsibility he had given them. What we see is a world structured not on autonomy but on love. And what develops, is a world of flourishing and abundance. But of course none of it is possible outside the fundamental principle of the family. Gloriously loving and caring for the ones we did not consent to receive, but receiving them like a gift as we receive our very lives.

And this went on forever and ever. And that's the families were in today. Record scratch.

3. The Broken Family

Genesis 3:16 | To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Adam sins against God by participating in Eve's deception. Adam and Eve both fall into sin, rebelling against God as their creator they hide from him. Humanity as members of God's family are estranged. Adam and Eve's firstborn son is murdered by his brother who becomes estranged from them in exile. Abraham and Sarah can't conceive. Isaac wants to give the wrong son the promise. Esau threatens to kill Jacob and Jacob flees to never speak with his father again. Jacob marries two women whose best years are spent trying to destroy one another's pregnancy's.

The natural condition of the family falls into radical disorder. I gave philosophical reasons for the diabolical nature of the modern family but of course these reasons are far downstream from the true cause. Sin against God, produced fracture and death through all the families of the world. Genesis is basically the story of one very screwed up family and that theme doesn't really let up through the rest of scripture.

The glory of family as we've seen it's intended pattern, the fundamental picture of the gift of love in our lives, has been twisted by sin. The most pain you will experience is within your family. But this is the story of a rich family who lost everything and the one son who had no choice but to keep them all together.

The gospel is the message of restoration of our position before God. And this restoration in Christ, the second Adam means that by faith we inherit a new family. And this new heavenly orientation in Christ means that our families can be restored beginning right where you are. The promise is for you and for your children and all who are far off. Now on this side of the fall we are learning by grace how to build a Christian home.