

Lesson 1

What Happened to the Family?

If the family goes, everything goes

You may have heard that a church, community, or nation will rise no higher than the spiritual condition of its families. As the family disintegrates, so does the nation as well as the church. When the family goes, everything goes. Today our nation finds itself dealing with multiple crises of out of control violent crime, overflowing prisons, drug addiction, pornography, parental absence, childhood depression, anxiety and social integration issues, large numbers of angry and alienated young males, soaring suicide rates, low academic achievement in its urban public schools, ever-shifting morals, abortion, the creation of a victim class, and poor work ethics. It feels as if things are cascading out of control as the majority of the nation continues to embrace all things secular. Many of these problems share something in common – a broken home.

You have probably heard the statistics on fatherless homes and marriage/divorce ratio. You probably also know someone who has experienced family violence, infidelity, and emotional and sexual child abuse. The wreckage is all around and easy to see.

Children in broken homes “are 5 times more likely to commit suicide, 6 times more likely to be in poverty, 9 times more likely to drop out of high school, 10 times more likely to abuse chemical substances, 14 times more likely to commit rape, 20 times more likely to end up in prison, 32 times more likely to run away from home.”¹

Some young people have been subjected to so much emotional harm from the family dysfunction they've witnessed that they are afraid of commitment, possess little desire to marry, and choose to live with someone... instead of creating the permanency of an established home. A child today may have several stepparents before they graduate high school. And we're not just talking about the families of unbelievers. Speak with any Christian counselor and you learn that all of the crises mentioned above are taking place in the homes of Christians as well.

Make no mistake, the family, as defined by God, is under attack. In some ways this is nothing new. Since the beginning, Satan has attacked and subverted God's design for the family. What *is* new, for us in America at least, is the brazenness and openness of the attacks. Secular liberalism has, as former Attorney General William Barr said, unleashed "*licentiousness* - the unbridled pursuit of personal appetites at the expense of common good." Barr goes on to say:

This is just another form of tyranny - where the individual is enslaved by his appetites, and the possibility of any healthy community life crumbles. This is not decay; it is organized destruction.

Secularists, and their allies among the “progressives,” have marshaled all the force of mass communications, popular culture, the entertainment industry, and academia in an unremitting assault on religion and traditional values.²

The organized destruction Barr speaks of is not political-speak. It is real. Social liberals are redefining everything. One feminist theorist, geographer, and avowed socialist insists *motherhood*

is merely an ideological construct that is used as a weapon. Sophie Lewis was quoted in an article that appeared in *The Nation* a few years back. For her, mothers are renamed as "'gestators', or people who are carrying fetuses." She claims they often undergo biological and societal violence through oppression, possession, and patriarchy. So, she is calling for "family abolition."

We know that the nuclear private household is where the majority of abuse can happen. And then there's the whole question of what it is for: training us up to be workers, training us to be inhabitants of a binary-gendered and racially stratified system, training us not to be queer. ...It would be useful for us to implement a sense that it is normal to think about babies as made by many people. I would support policies that expand the number of people who are socially and legally recognized as central, fundamental players in the constitution of a person...³

More recently, the socially popular Black Lives Matter movement expressed its desire to "disrupt" the traditional family structure:

We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and 'villages' that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable.⁴

This kind of thinking is the basis for what some of our national leaders are calling for when they speak of how people and minor children should have the freedom to pick whatever family form that works for them. Family disruption is the goal. Since the two-parent home is impossible for some to attain, the community will raise the children. The community, school board, or government believe they are more informed than the parents anyway. This is why we are seeing advocates for children's rights abstain from informing parents when their minor child has obtained an abortion or gender-altering surgery. This is happening more and more in public schools around the country.

Our heads are spinning as things pick up speed. Right before our eyes we are witnessing the redefining of marriage and family to align our most intimate relationships with personal preferences and lifestyle choices. Gender fluidity is all the rage. Social media and major corporations are currently celebrating a man who a few years ago came out as a homosexual who preferred other men, only to "change his gender" to a female. Having just completed his first year as a transgender, he has decided to become a lesbian. It's certainly confusing. (He could have just remained straight.) In 2022, June 13 was declared to be MAP pride day (MAP refers to "Minor Attracted Persons"). While the LGBT movement initially sought to distance itself from pedophilia, some activists are now making concentrated efforts to normalize it and connect it with the larger movement. This is exactly what conservatives warned would happen back in 2015.

The agenda to not only *accept* these lifestyles but *celebrate* them is being pushed down our throats. People are groping, guided by their own desires and standard of authority, to try to find out how to make meaningful relationships as societal problems continue to escalate. The chaos will only continue to grow.

Defining the Family

What is a family? Traditionally, the family unit has been viewed as a father (a male), mother (a

female), and children (the nuclear family) living together in the same household. One person defines it this way:

One man and one woman united in marriage, plus natural or adopted children and, any other people related by blood.⁵

These definitions are based on the Judeo-Christian values and morality upon which our nation was founded. Genesis 1.27-28; 2.18-25 provide the details of how God designed the family ... the oldest institution in creation ... going all the way back to the 6th day.

Male and Female

There are only two genders. We do not get to decide.

So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female., Genesis 1.27.

Jesus quoted this verse in his reply to the Pharisees in Matthew 19.4: *he who created them in the beginning made them male and female.*

Children

One purpose of marriage and family is procreation. With the union of male and female come children.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth,” Genesis 1.28.

Genesis 2 provides us with further details of God's work on the 6th day as it gives us the story of the creation of woman and the establishment of the family. The procreation spoken of in Genesis 1.28 was designed by God to take place inside the marriage relationship.

Marriage

Genesis 2.24 teaches us that monogamous heterosexual marriage is the divine standard and has been since day 6 of the creation. Homosexuality, fornication, adultery, and cohabitation are all excluded. The original design is that marriage is to take place between a man and woman who have left their parents, having made a covenant together to bond for life. To this Jesus adds:

So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate, Matthew 19.6.

In the act of marriage, we have the basic family unit. In Genesis 2.24 we learn three things regarding it:

1. It involves a **leaving**. *This is why a man leaves his father and mother...* The man enters into a covenant relationship with the woman...meaning a new entity or relationship has been created. Now the loyalties to that covenant supersede any parental loyalties.
2. It involves a **bonding**. *...and bonds with his wife...* While marital sex is in view here, the bond involves both becoming dependent upon and responsible to each other.

3. It also involves a **public declaration**. *...and they become one flesh*. Marriage involves a declaration of intention where the redefining of obligations and relationships are conducted in communicated in a societal setting.

Scripture places the highest honor on marriage and family. It has been designed by God to be the purest, most blessed, and wonderful relationship God has ever given. It is the very best. There is no relationship on earth like it. No relationship on earth can ever come close to the joy and fulfillment it provides. It must be guarded and respected with the deepest sense of awe and reverence.

Society's Attempt to Redefine "Marriage" and "Family"

As the 21st century has unfolded, **marriage** is no longer exclusive to heterosexuals. The government has reflected the changing culture by sanctioning homosexual marriage. It is now widely practiced and accepted by a growing majority, along with the widespread acceptance of unwed couples with children born outside of marriage (co-habitation). Although at the present it remains on the fringe of society, we are hearing more and more about group marriage (3 or more partners who live together as married people, with children. This arrangement has yet to gain official sanction by the government.) And if we want to go out to the most extreme, a British paper reported on the marriage of a woman to her cat in order to get around her "heartless" landlords.⁶ It is clear to see that we are living in a time where anything goes.

In his comprehensive article in *The Atlantic*, David Brooks argues that the nuclear **family** was a mistake, saying the family structure we've held up as the cultural ideal for the last half century has been a catastrophe for many. He argues the time has come for us to figure out better ways to live together. He describes:

The period when the nuclear family flourished was not normal. It was a freakish historical moment when all of society conspired to obscure its essential fragility.⁷

Brooks goes on to argue that these types of family arrangements do have their strengths but are "exhausting and stifling," allowing little privacy where a person is "forced to be in daily intimate contact with people you didn't choose." He decries the fact that women were relegated to the home. Speaking of the 1950's and early 60's he writes, "Demeaning and disempowering treatment of women was rampant. Women spent enormous numbers of hours trapped inside the home under the headship of their husband, raising children." And yet, after over 50 years of women's liberation and sexual freedom championed by social liberals, Brooks bemoans how things are falling apart today with the American family. He claims the philosophy of life social conservatives want can no longer be

...operationalized, because it is no longer relevant," while progressives "have no philosophy of family life at all because they don't want to seem judgmental. The sexual revolution has come and gone, and it's left us with no governing norms of family life, no guiding values, no articulated ideals.

On this most central issue, our shared culture often has nothing relevant to say...

Brooks concludes his article by arguing only from human wisdom... saying we need a completely

new paradigm where we move from "nuclear families to forged families" by "experimenting with new forms of kinship and extended family so that we can discover the stability we crave."⁸

Which Way Will We Go?

So... here are we are. Awash in competing worldviews... one of which is completely rooted in naturalism and humanistic thinking. The other worldview, we are told, is irrelevant and broken. Which is right?

Is the Biblical worldview outdated?

Does it not work?

God's way always works. The problem is the human proclivity to ignore God and go his own way. The breakdown of the family can be directly attributed to the weakness that comes from a poor or nonexistent relationship with God. Families become weak when they are weak in their knowledge of and convictions about God. They are weak when they haven't experienced the power of God and the influence of His Spirit teaching them how to love one another.

What we are witnessing in America today is not how God planned things. He has designed the family as the place Christianity can be developed and nurtured individually. It is the place where moral character is planted and grown. It is the place where civility and respect for others are nurtured and cultivated.⁹ It has been designed by God to be a place of stability, love, peace, harmony, and positive growth.

Like no time in our history, the time has come for American Christians to not only profess their belief in the divine pattern for the family, it is imperative we model it. To model it effectively we have to go to the heart of the problem.

Humanism

Dave Bradford succinctly defines the philosophy of humanism as "refusing to have God in one's knowledge."¹⁰ Humanism is the natural result from the beliefs of atheism, pantheism, deism, and organic evolution. If there is no God to direct us, then we are left to rely on humanistic thinking to guide us. Bradford identifies some of the basic beliefs of humanism as:

1. The universe is self-existing, not created.
2. Man evolved and is purely organic, with no eternal soul.
3. Any idea of a connected, caring God, who would provide salvation by giving the hope of heaven is outdated and harmful to man.
4. Moral values are situational and autonomous. No lifestyle should be considered evil as long as it does not hurt or compel others into it.

Secular humanism competes against Christianity, rejecting the existence of a personal God who created the world, revealed Himself in history, and came in the person of Jesus Christ to save the world.¹¹ Today, secular humanists have developed a comprehensive view on various issues relating

to the nature of man, moral values, and the role of the state. Over the last century, humanism's impact has shaped almost everything in American culture, including education, media, film, and music.

Humanism's Devastating Impact on the Family

If there is no God and man is merely an animal with only the destiny to die ultimately, then he is free to determine his own purpose in life. His own preferences become his moral standard. He is his own God. For the humanist, it does not matter what a person does concerning his family so long as he recognizes the world as his family and avoids telling others what to do.

Individuals should not be unduly restrained, restricted, or prohibited from exercising a wide range of personal choices. This includes the freedom to pursue one's own lifestyle, so long as one does not prevent others from exercising their rights.¹²

The secular humanists...always seem to stand on the side of human freedom. They defend the right of the mother to abort her child; the right of the pornographer to promote and sell his smut; the right of homosexuals to teach their way of life in schools as a "neutral" option so students can make their own choices; and they campaign for the right to show X-rated movies, as well as the right to treat delicate sexual matters in a free and open way on TV, in the classroom, and in the theater. The danger of the secularist point of view is that it promotes a sick, narcissistic society in which no one thinks in terms of anything but "my" rights.¹³

These views have completely reshaped the culture. Instead of living for others and exhibiting self-sacrifice, people have become more individualistic and self-oriented. People have grown to value their own privacy and autonomy, living as they choose. A few years ago two sociologists studied the themes of women's magazines from 1900 to 1979. In the 1950's, themes of putting family before self dominated: "Love means self-sacrifice and compromise." By the mid 1960's and into the 70's that had reversed itself, where putting self before family was more prominent: "Love means self-expression and individuality."¹⁴ Since the 1960's the dominant family culture in America has been the "self-expressive marriage."

Americans now look to marriage increasingly for self-discovery, self-esteem and personal growth. Fueled by the countercultural currents of the 1960s, they have come to view marriage less as an essential institution and more as an elective means of achieving personal fulfillment.¹⁵

This idea is also echoed by sociologists Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas. They say that for many, marriage is no longer primarily about childbearing and child-rearing, it is primarily about adult fulfillment. While everyone says a child needs two parents, marriage is now seen as something unnecessary to accomplish that goal.

Couples who live together can parent as easily as those who are married. And just because a man and woman find they can't stay together doesn't mean a man cannot still play the role of father to his child.¹⁶

They go on to discuss how for many marriage has become an indulgence that is simply not practical while raising children. Marriage is only for those who arrive at a place of economic stability and personal growth that will be able to withstand problems that come along the way. For them, "marriage is the prize at the end of the race," and as a result many "are not willing to

make promises they are not sure they can keep."

There is much more that could be said, but space will not allow. But the impact of living solely for personal fulfillment where self is god and its devastating effects on the family should be clearly seen. At the heart of these problems is selfish pride that exalts oneself over everything else.

We must get back to the Biblical Worldview

If our families are going to survive and prosper, we must humble ourselves individually and embrace God's truth and righteousness. You have not been created to live for yourself, you have been created to live for God and for others.

He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands," Matthew 22.37-40.

This will be expressed through selfless love, care, devotion, and training of others. It will involve personal sacrifice. It will involve respecting God above all else.

God's Ways Work

There was a time in American life when conditions in society were ideal for family stability and cohesion. Much of it was centered around godly values. If we will trust His ways again, build our families according to His plan, the growing chaos we see will be lessened. Will we trust Him?

For Discussion:

1. What are some ways the family is under attack at the present?
2. How does God define a family?
3. How is society attempting to redefine the family?
4. What is humanism?

5. How can we fight back against humanism?

6. Is there any hope for the family? Explain.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Wiley, Marcus, as quoted by Evita Duffey-Alfonso. "Painting 'Black Lives Matter' on NBA Courts is a Bad Idea, Read BLM's Mission Statement." *The Federalist*. July 3, 2020.

² Barr, William P. "Attorney General William P. Barr Delivers Remarks to the Law School and the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame." 10/11/2019. Online: Retrieved 06/01/2023 at www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-william-p-barr-delivers-remarks-law-school-and-de-nicola-center-ethics

³ Lewis, Sophie, as quoted by Rosemary Ho. "Want to Dismantle Capitalism? Abolish the Family." *The Nation*. May 16, 2019. Retrieved 06/01/23 at www.thenation.com/article/archive/want-to-dismantle-capitalism-abolish-the-family

⁴ This quote was originally found on the "What We Believe" page at blacklivesmatter.com but was later deleted. When asked, the organization has not specified as to why it was removed. Their original set of beliefs can be found here: web.archive.org/web/20200408020723/https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe.

⁵ Köstenberger, Andreas J., and David W. Jones. *Marriage and the Family: Biblical Essentials*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

⁶ Roberts, J. London Metro News: "Woman marries her cat to get round pet-hating landlords." Online. Retrieved 05/31/23 from metro.co.uk/2022/04/25/london-woman-marries-her-cat-to-get-round-pet-hating-landlords-16531222/

⁷ Brooks, David. "The Nuclear Family Was a Mistake." *The Atlantic*. March 2020.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Rainey, Dennis, ed. *Building Strong Families. Foundations for the Family Series*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002, p. 14.

¹⁰ Bradford, Dave. "The Disease: Humanistic Thinking." *The Godly Family in a Sick Society*. Edited by Melvin D. Curry. Florida College Annual Lectures. Temple Terrace, FL: Florida College Bookstore, 1979.

¹¹ Webber, Robert E. *Secular Humanism: Threat and Challenge*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982, p. 16.

¹² Kurtz, Paul. *Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2000, p. 48.

¹³ Webber, p. 49.

¹⁴ Brooks.

¹⁵ Finkel, Eli J. "The All-or-Nothing Marriage." *The New York Times*. February 14, 2014.

¹⁶ Edin, Kathryn and Kefalas, Maria. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood before Marriage*. University of California Press, 2011.