

God's Design for Marriage and Family Genesis 1:27 et al

The fundamental issue is whether we were designed by God, or whether we are the product of billions of years of mindless evolution with no design at all. The predominant secular culture propagates the latter and since it says there is no design that is God's ultimate design, it seeks to reorder the understanding of marriage and family to suit each person's own pleasure. Not to belabor the point, but if there is no God then there is no designer. If there is no designer, anything about human physiology, psychology and sociology that appears to have been designed, is purely fortuitous – amazing accidental design!!

The Judeo Christian understanding of who we are as human beings comes from God's revelation in the Bible. The Bible teaches that in the beginning God was present first of all and he created everything. The pinnacle of his creation was man and woman. Genesis 1:27 says that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." The creation of man and woman in God's image makes us the crowning glory of his creation.

Nothing else was created in His image. While we see the glory of God in his creation (Romans 1:20) human beings were created bearing the actual image of God. (Imagio Deo) Amongst all the blessings that come from this, two are of immense significance. (1) "Humanity was commissioned to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth..." (Genesis 1:28) that is to procreate. (2) "To subdue the earth and have dominion over it." (Genesis 1:28) Humanity is not just a part of an accident that happens to have evolved to superior intelligence, which is what the secularists say, but we were created by God to manage and supervise the whole of the created order both for our benefit and His glory.

It is the first of these creation ordinances that we address with our title, "God's Design for Marriage and Family".

Our Sexuality

God created us as sexual beings male and female. He did this so that we might have personal intimate relationships with each other in union with one another as husband and wife. (Genesis 1:23-25) As the Anglican Book of Common Prayer says in the blessing of a marriage "The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people."

"The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord."

The Bible sets forth a profound concept. The relationship of a husband and wife is seen as a human expression of the intimate relationship we human beings are to have with God. (Ephesians 5:21-32) “This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.” (Ephesians 5:32).

Unfaithfulness in a marriage is used as a descriptor of our unfaithfulness to God, and in no uncertain terms. It is described as “whoring after their gods.” (Exodus 34:15)

Marriage is set forth for us as spiritual, emotional and physical intimacy in such a complete way as to be an illustration of our intimacy with God; a relationship with total surrender and trust. When we break that trust, we break the relationship to God and are described as “whoring!”

“Imagio Deo”

“... God is love.” (1 John 4:8) God who is love created us out of love not out of need. God conferred with Himself (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and said “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.” (Genesis 1:26)

Who we are as human beings is a gift of God’s love and it is a great honor to be created after his likeness. That is: (1) To be self-aware; to be self conscious, to be able to reflect on ourselves and understand ourselves and to know who we are – just as God did of Himself! No other part of the created order can do this. (2) To be moral; understanding right from wrong; to be held accountable for what we do wrong, and to have pleasure and fulfillment in doing what is good and right. (3) To love one another; as that love is expressed perfectly in the Godhead, and indeed to love one another as God has loved us. (4) To be creative; to be able to imagine and to dream and to have the power to be procreators as God Himself is creative.

As God created us for his pleasure (Revelations 4:11) we are to give Him pleasure (Psalm 149:4) and to both give pleasure and take pleasure in our life together. All this is a great honor and a great gift from God and is to be used to give Him glory.

Family – The Place to Raise Children

God’s intention was that we in marriage bear offspring and join Him in the procreation of other human beings. In God’s scheme of things, the gift and heritage of children is a blessing from God. “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.” (Job 1:21) “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him.” (Psalm 127:3)

Three of the Ten Commandments reflect directly upon God’s understanding of family. Commandment 5 says, “Children are to honor their father and mother.” Commandment 7 says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Commandment #10 says amongst other things that, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.” How amazing it would be if husband and wife were faithful to each other in marriage and children honored their parents.

One of the marks of Christian maturity and one of the qualifications for Christian leadership is the quality of the Christian home and family. “An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.” (Titus 1:56)

The leader of God’s Family (The Church), must have a wholesome family life at home.

To Align With the Design

It follows from a biblical insistence that human sexuality as expressed in the human family is God’s idea and that God commands and directs how we are to live out our sexuality in the family. I say to couples as I counsel them in preparation for marriage: “Do you want a great marriage?” They always say “Yes, of course.” I then say: “Do you want an average marriage?” which implies mediocrity. They always say “No.” (I do have to comment in passing that for a lot of marriages, “average” would look good since there is such pain and distress in too many homes.) Then I go on to say “If you want a great marriage, since God is the designer of marriage you want to do it His way.”

It all sounds so obvious, but sexual unfaithfulness in marriage has produced the horrors of a society in which half the children in the United States are growing up in single-parent homes. It is no wonder that the number one cause of death amongst adolescents is suicide. The confusion that comes from broken promises and infidelity is evident in our society, amongst our children, and not the least, in the brokenness of divorced people.

Sexual Promiscuity

“Sexual promiscuity, especially in the adolescent community has created an epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases” quoted from the book, “Epidemic” written by Dr. Meg Meeker. The statistics below are taken from this book.

- Of the more than 15 million new STD infections in the U.S. each year: two-thirds will occur in people under 25 years of age; one in four will occur in teenagers.
- Every year approximately 10 billion dollars is spent on major STDs other than AIDS and their complications. This cost is shared by all Americans.
- More than one third of 9 th graders have had sexual intercourse.
- More than half of 12 th graders have had sexual intercourse.
- New studies show that clinical depression in adolescent boys and girls is related to sexual activity and drinking.

Pornography

Pornography is perhaps the most destructive immoral force in our society today. It is a \$40 Billion business which is as large, if not larger, than the monies that are made or spent annually on all major sports, including baseball, football, basketball, and hockey. Inasmuch as pornography is a radically sick distortion of God’s intention for sex and how

we sexually express ourselves, we have a moral cancer spreading in a rapid and out of control fashion.

Homosexuality and Pedophilia

Homosexual behavior and Pedophilia are two very destructive immoral forces in Western civilization. It is one thing for homosexuals to practice their deviant behavior contrary to God's design, but it was not that long ago that it seemed unimaginable that there would be a promotion of the Homosexual lifestyle within our state-directed education system. Growing up into adolescence is a complicated enough process under normal circumstances, as young men and women pass through puberty into adulthood. But when it is suggested that perhaps students may be Homosexual in orientation, and that they should experiment with a Homosexual behavior in the same way that Heterosexuals experiment, and all this is further encouraged by the availability of condoms, it is no wonder that we have a proliferation of personality disorders as well as sexually transmitted diseases. The Bible makes it very clear that sex outside of marriage, (fornication), sexual unfaithfulness between married persons (adultery), and homosexual behaviors are destructive to our human dignity, our relationships, our personalities, our society, and above all, destructive to our relationship with God Himself.

Romans 1:22-32 sums it up this way: "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents, they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."

This is a graphic description of the ensuing moral and social chaos of doing things our way rather than God's way.

God's Redeeming Love

Amazingly, Astoundingly, Mercifully! "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his

blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." (Romans 5:8-11)

Again, as if almost beyond belief, it is possible "to become a new creation," (2 Corinthians 5:17) as the Lord Jesus Christ put it – "to be born again." (John 3:3). The good news of the gospel is that God can heal and forgive the brokenness of divorce. He can transform children coming out of broken homes and make them agents of renewal themselves. Those who have been sexually promiscuous and rebelled against God's order of things can begin a new life: Young people who have lost their virginity can begin again and in a very real sense receive a second virginity. No matter how messed up our lives have been we can start a whole new way of living that can pass on from one generation to another.

Let me speak from personal experience. I am the son of a Godless home, growing up in England. We never went to church. We had no Bible. We never prayed together. However, because we received some religious education in our public school system and because the British were still living within the context of an assumed Christian morality as a nation, I did grow up knowing right from wrong and had some information about God and the Christian faith. What we experienced in microcosm in my family, is what it seems society at large experiences today. My mother was unfaithful to my Dad while I was still a little boy of 6. When I was 7 my father committed suicide because he did not know how to live with the shame of my mother's unfaithfulness. My mother married again. That marriage ended in divorce, and I lived through the misery of my mother and stepfather's squabbling. The product of those two marriages was five children, of which I am the oldest.

At age 18, because of the witness of a man to the gospel of Christ and the Lord's power to transform a life, and then hearing Billy Graham preach in London, Jesus Christ came into my life. I was born again of His Holy Spirit and began a whole new life.

As a result of my coming to faith, not only did I go into the Christian ministry as a preacher, pastor and evangelist, but I married a wonderful Christian woman, Kathleen Heggart. We have four amazing daughters, three of whom have been, or are, in a professional ministry.

Wonderfully, my mother came to faith in the Lord Jesus, and experienced His forgiveness. One day, at a preaching mission in England, she walked down the aisle to publicly give her life to Christ. I was at the front of the auditorium directing counselors to those who were making professions of faith. It was overwhelming to have my mother walk down that aisle and into my arms.

My brother Tony, closest to me in age, became a radiant Christian, partly because of his seeing and experiencing what God had done in my life and in my family. My brother's wife, Christine came to faith and is a devoted follower of Christ. Together they have used

their home for evangelistic meetings using the Alpha Group as their means of sharing their faith.

My sister Mary, the youngest of my siblings, along with her husband and their two children have come to faith, and are having a tremendous impact on their home town, Knoxville, TN. All I can exclaim is "To God be the glory, great things he has done."

So, let me close with these encouragements! In these chaotic and immoral times, with the erosion of absolute values and the promotion of relativism, the only hope for a reversal of the public moral decline in our nation is the preaching of God's word, the upholding of God's truth, and bearing testimony to the gospel of Jesus Christ which is the power of God for salvation. We must seek to have laws of the land reflect the standards and truth of God's word, but ultimately one cannot legislate morality and have people then yield to that legislation. As Benjamin Franklin said, "Bad people will always find their way around good laws, but good people will find a way to make bad laws work." How then to get more good people!! Preach the Gospel!

Clearly, we need a moral reformation in America. But the only way to a moral reformation is a spiritual awakening, and the only way to a spiritual awakening is the preaching of the gospel. And the only people who can preach the gospel are those that know and love the Lord Jesus.

Rise up O men of God,
Have done with lesser things.
Give heart and mind and soul and strength
To serve the King of kings.

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