



## *The Christian*

# **LIVING IN TODAY'S FAMILY ENVIRONMENT**

A recent article titled "Beyond the Traditional Family" by Peter Singer of Princeton University states, "In many countries today, the traditional family consisting of a heterosexual married couple with children is becoming less dominant, as same-sex marriage, co-parenting, and single-parent child-rearing spread." It's amazing how much the view of family has changed in recent years. Thomas Jefferson wrote, "It is in the love of one's family only that heartfelt happiness is known. By a law of our nature, we cannot be happy without the endearing connections of a family." What has happened to the traditional family we once knew? How did we get to this point, and how can a Christian family function in today's society?

### **GOD'S FAMILY PLAN**

No doubt we would agree that our families play a large part in our lives. We grow up in them, we produce them, we enjoy being with them in our old age, we rely on them, we pray for them, and we live with many happy family memories. We need family. What a lonely life is lived apart from any family connection.

Where did the concept of family begin? To answer that question we need to go back to the first chapter of Genesis. The notion of the family began on day six of creation when we read in Genesis 1:27,28, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" It was God's plan to create men and women in his image, and they were given the directive to propagate and begin families. God continued the topic in Genesis 2: "The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.' That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." Adam confirmed God's plan. He agreed that there was to be a promise covenant between one husband and one wife. The two would become one flesh. God's plan was perfect as was all his creation. Marriage was begun by God. It was his idea. It included one man and one woman who together would form a bond so close they would function as one.

Throughout the Bible God included more details in his plan for the family as he outlined the duties of husbands, wives and children. Paul wrote to the Colossians: "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord."

***Why was God's plan for the family a perfect plan?***

### **Husbands/Fathers**

The major responsibility for the welfare of the family rests with the father. As the head of the family, the father's first duty is to acquaint his family with the Lord. The father is God's earthly representative, and as such he bears the responsibility to be well acquainted with God's Word that he might raise his family in God's ways. Ephesians 6:4 states clearly the role of the father. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." It is the father's responsibility to see that his children are properly instructed and disciplined according to the Lord's Word. Often fathers do not realize that the examples they set

in words and actions are studied closely by their children and will play an important part in how they will parent their eventual homes.

Ephesians 5 further explains that the father is responsible to see that his wife is cared for so she can find joy and happiness in her role as wife and mother. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

***Comment on this statement: “Good fathers mirror the Fatherhood of God.”***

### **Wives/Mothers**

Likewise, Scripture also shows the mother her role as a family member. God has placed within mothers a special closeness to their children that begins when the baby is still within the womb. God provides women this unique bond so they can communicate and nurture their children in a special way. Proverbs 31:25-28 says, “She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.”

Likewise God has established the role of wife as well. Proverbs 31 continues, “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.”

***How does a Christian mother plan, accept, and wisely “let go?” In what ways does a mother never “let go?”***

### **Children**

Certainly one purpose of the family is to be fruitful and multiply. God’s gift of children brings joy into a home. We read in Psalm 127:3-5, “Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.” Like parents, children are also given responsibilities. They are commanded to obey their parents and to honor them. Ephesians 6:1-3 says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’—which is the first commandment with a promise—‘so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’” Notice that children are to honor both the father and mother. Regardless of their age, children should respect the office of their parents even though at times that may be difficult. Children must understand that parents are stained with the same sin that affects us all. No matter how well-intended they may be, there is no such thing as the perfect parent. Jesus touched on this in Luke 11:11-13 where he compared the love of an earthly father with that of the Father in heaven. “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Mothers, fathers, children, families, are all God’s. He established them to be a perfect society in and of itself. God’s plan for the family was laid out clearly in Scripture. Families were not to be made of gay or lesbian parents, unmarried partners, or intentionally single parents. Likewise children were not to be raised by a village or the government, nor do they have the same decision-making authority as do their parents.

***Some say the roles of parents and children has changed over the years. Agree or disagree.***

***Name some things parents might do that could positively or negatively affect their children.***

## ***What are the dangers of parents who become buddies, drill sergeants or helicopters to their children?***

### **GOD'S PLAN RUINED**

Sin destroyed the perfect plan for the home. Adam and Eve rejected God's plan when they disobeyed him. They ate the forbidden fruit and brought sin not only on themselves, but into their future family as well. Marriage and family life would never be completely what was once intended. Adam and Eve learned this lesson the hard way. It wasn't long before the first family was exposed to hatred and murder between its own children.

Sin would now be evident within the family structure. In addition to hatred and strife, the idea of one man and one woman was also challenged. In Genesis 4 we read that Lamech, grandson of Adam and Eve, took two wives. Polygamy had begun. (*Polygamy* simply means multiple spouses. More accurately, *polygyny* would be one man with multiple wives while *polyandry* would be one woman with multiple husbands. *Bigamy* is another word for having two spouses.) Nowhere in Scripture does God condone multiple husbands or wives although many such arrangements are mentioned. If we look closely at those marriages, we note disastrous results. Abraham had sons with both Hagar and Sarah which led to hatred that is still evident today. Jacob had children with two wives and their two handmaids. Ten of their sons plotted to kill their brother Joseph. Gideon had "many" wives and seventy sons. One son, Abimelech, murdered all but one of his brothers. David had at least eighteen wives. David's son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar. Tamar's brother Absalom retaliated and killed Amnon. Then Absalom tried to take the throne from his father. Solomon can boast the record of seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Scripture says "his wives turned his heart after other gods." Whenever people stray from God's intent it results in pain and suffering.

Lest we get the impression that all families in the Bible were dysfunctional, we should also see the positive examples Scripture sets before us. Since God has nowhere included specific how-to instructions on raising children, we can gather insights from the many examples shown us in his Word. For instance, in the Old Testament we meet Hannah who pleaded with the Lord for a child and then dedicated Samuel to serve the Lord. In the New Testament we read of Timothy's mother Eunice, who raised a fine young man to become a missionary partner for Paul. Moses, Daniel, and Joseph were three young men who were taken from their parents at a young age and placed into the homes of unbelievers. Joseph was sold to Egyptians, Moses grew up in the palace of Pharaoh's daughter, and Daniel was taken to Babylon. Yet all three displayed tremendous faith. That faith certainly reflected on their parents who taught them about a loving God at an early age.

***Cite other faithful and troubled families in the Bible?***

### **ENTER HUMANISM**

Today much of society's thinking is based on the philosophy of humanism. Humanism is the belief that man is the center of the universe; the ultimate ruler, problem solver, and intelligence. It is the informal worship of humanity, the attempt to remove God from society and replace him with the human mind, or as Satan suggested, "You will be like God." Ezekiel wrote about this philosophy in Ezekiel 28:2, "In the pride of your heart you say, 'I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas.' But you are a mere mortal and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god." Acts 12:21-23 teaches this lesson well, "On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, 'The voice of a god, and not of a man!' Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last."

Today Humanism is working overtime to destroy the family structure by replacing it with individual rights and sexual perversions without any limits. One goal of humanism is to remove the traditional definition of family. Living without God means living without the original plan for man and woman. Modern technology and social media play into the hands of the humanists as they further separate children from their parents and make them individualists. In worship of self, selfishness becomes a virtue as society accepts the words, "if it feels

good, do it." For humanists, non-married couples living together, as well as communal, homosexual and lesbian marriages are acceptable. Polling estimates today suggest that 75% of Americans agree with cohabitation before marriage, and sadly, according to Christian Mingle dating service survey, that number among young Christians is over 50%. Humanism further encourages an individual's right to abortion, euthanasia, crossing sexual lines, and redesigning the role of male and female. Since humanism breeds in a society free from a God in heaven, each of these changes is intended to destroy the traditional family ordained by God.

***What are some ways we see humanism in our world today?***

## **GOD'S FAMILY TODAY**

The family has the greatest opportunity to help a child grow not only physically, socially, and mentally, but spiritually, because it is the single greatest influence on children. Consequently godly education must begin at birth and continue even after the child leaves the nest. Parents hold the primary responsibility of raising godly children. And although regular church attendance, Sunday school, and Christian schooling are all tremendous aids for the parent, the ultimate responsibility still rests on the home where time is to be taken every day to nurture the child's spiritual life. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 shows that training children in God's ways must become part of a parent's daily routine. "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." Joshua 24:15 declares, "As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." Some ways this can be done is through family prayers at meals and other times of the day, reading Bible stories, daily family devotions, discussing television programs, reviewing church sermons, singing Christian songs, listening to Christian music, discussing the religious side of politics and current events, and at the proper time, discussing illness and death.

Another way parents can properly train their children is by correctly applying the law and the gospel. The law must be present so that the children learn to live according to the 10 Commandments and the rules established by the parents. The law shows the child moral values and exposes their sinfulness and their need of a Savior. However a family that uses only the law falls short of God's plan. The law only prepares the heart to enjoy the beautiful message of the gospel. Parents must also teach their children about the love of Jesus through Bible stories, hymns, daily devotions, and random comments. Likewise all discipline must follow the rule of "law then gospel." First the child is shown his or her sin, and then he or she is presented with the good news of forgiveness.

***Why is the proper use of the law and gospel so important? What happens if we stray too far in either direction?***

Consider a few other problems facing families today:

**Busyness:** Too often families are so busy that God is pushed out of the daily routine. Many Christian families no longer have time to sit and talk about their faith. Rather they are caught up in daily schedules that compete for time with God. Is this healthy for the Christian family? The author of Hebrews says we must run with endurance the race set before us. That race is not the "rat race" many are running today. Parents must realize that our world's ruthless determination to produce ace athletes, top honors students, and guaranteeing our children's success at every endeavor can be in danger of missing the one thing needful. That one thing is a relationship with Jesus Christ.

***What are some parameters parents can set to provide more time for family togetherness?***

**Greed:** Things. Doing things, getting things, having things, and needing better things has become another driving force in our generation. Scripture nowhere says that things can satisfy our souls. Wise and wealthy Solomon wrote, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread." In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount he clearly said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21.)

***Someone has said, "It is getting more difficult to buy gifts because they have everything." Agree? Disagree?***

**Isolation:** Some families have swung the pendulum in the other direction by attempting to isolate their children from the world around them. While it is true that we must not love the things of this world, it is also true that God put us in the midst of his mission field. Jesus did not isolate himself from the outcasts of society. Rather he went to them and showed them his love. We must learn to function in both our godly kingdom and our earthly kingdom. We must teach our children to share the love of Jesus with everyone.

***What are some lines you would draw to keep your children from worldly things?***

**Peer Pressure:** Many families have been destroyed by children who were caught up in the wrong crowd. Children must be taught to recognize the difference between good and evil relationships and choose the right way. We should never fool ourselves into thinking that our children's faithfulness to Jesus will outperform the world's hatred for him. Lot did not change the people of Sodom. Sodom changed him. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" And again we read in Proverbs 13:20, "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."

***How does social media make it difficult to manage our children's friends?***

***How much should a parent strive to know about their children's friends?***

**Lack of a Firm Conviction:** Many studies are finding that the reason many Christian children are leaving the church in their younger years is because they are not firmly grounded in their convictions. They know the Bible stories, but when faced with the hostile world in the public arena they quickly succumb to foolish rhetoric. God's people must not only know the "what" of the Bible but also the "why."

***Add to these other problems families are facing today. What do you feel is the greatest battle?***

***Someone has said "I prayed for my kids when they were young. But now that they are older and out of the house I find the need for prayer even greater." Do you agree? Disagree? Explain.***

It is Christ and the gospel that makes the Christian home different from all others. Therefore we impress on our children the need to find a godly mate and to raise the next generation in the ways of the Lord. Psalm 78:5-7 says it well, "He commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands."