

The Nucleus of Civilization

Scripture: Genesis 1:1–25; Genesis 2:18–24; Matthew 19:5

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According to the Bible, God himself ordained the family as the basic building block of human society, because He deemed it "not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). That verse stands out starkly in the biblical creation narrative, because as Scripture describes the successive days of the creation week, the text punctuates each stage of creation with the words, "God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, italics added). The goodness of creation emerges as the main theme of Genesis 1, and the statement "God saw that it was good" is repeated again and again, like the refrain after each stanza of a lengthy song. Then finally, after the sixth day of creation, we're told with emphasis, "God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (italics added).

But then Genesis 2:18 takes us back to the end of day six and reveals that just before God ended His creative work, just one thing was left that was "not good." Every aspect of the entire universe was finished. Each galaxy, star, planet, rock, grain of sand, and tiny molecule was in place. All the species of living things had been created. Adam had already given "names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field" (Genesis 2:20). But there was still one glaring unfinished aspect of creation: "For Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:20). Adam was alone, and in need of a suitable mate. Therefore God's final act of creation on day six—the crowning step that made everything in the universe perfect—was accomplished by the forming of Eve from Adam's rib. Then "He brought her to the man" (Genesis 2:22).

By that act, God established the family for all time. The Genesis narrative says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Jesus quoted that verse in Matthew 19:5 to underscore the sanctity and permanence of marriage as an institution. The same verse is quoted practically every time two believers are united in a Christian marriage ceremony. It is a reminder that marriage and the family are ordained by God and therefore sacred in His sight.

So it is no mere accident of history that family relationships have always been the very nucleus of all human civilization. According to Scripture, that is precisely the way God designed it to be. And therefore, if the family crumbles as an institution, all of civilization will ultimately crumble along with it.

Over the past few generations, we have seen that destructive process taking place before our eyes. It seems contemporary secular society has declared war on the family. Casual sex is expected. Divorce is epidemic. Marriage itself is in decline, as multitudes of men and women have decided it's preferable to live together without making a covenant or formally constituting a family. Abortion is a worldwide plague. Juvenile delinquency is rampant, and many parents have deliberately abandoned their roles of authority in the family. On the other hand, child abuse in many forms is escalating. Modern and postmodern philosophies have attacked the traditional roles of men and women within the family. Special interest groups and even government agencies seem bent on the dissolution of the traditional family, advocating the normalization of homosexuality, same-sex "marriage," and (in some cultures nowadays) sterilization programs. Divorce has been made easy, tax laws penalize

marriage, and government welfare rewards childbirth outside of wedlock. All those trends (and many more like them) are direct attacks on the sanctity of the family.

These days whenever families are portrayed in films, television dramas, or sitcoms, they are almost always caricatured as grossly dysfunctional. Someone recently pointed out that the only television "family" who regularly attend church together are "The Simpsons"—and they are cartoon exaggerations deliberately saddled with the worst imaginable traits, designed mainly to mock and malign both church and family. It's no joke, though. A relentless parade of similarly dysfunctional assortments of people assaults us on television and in the movies. Hollywood has defined a broad new meaning for the word family.

Meanwhile, traditional nuclear families with a strong, reliable father and a mother whose priorities are in the home have been banished from popular culture, made to feel as if they were the caricature.

Although many Christian leaders have been passionately voicing concerns about the dissolution of the family for decades, things have grown steadily worse, not better, in society at large. Secular social commentators have lately begun to claim that the traditional nuclear family is no longer even "realistic." An article published not long ago by the on-line magazine Salon said this: "The 'ideal' American family—a father and a mother, bound to each other by legal marriage, raising children bound to them by biology—is a stubborn relic, a national symbol that has yet to be retired as threadbare and somewhat unrealistic." [1] The nuclear family simply won't work in 21st-century society, according to many of these self-styled "experts."

I know those voices are wrong, however, because I have witnessed literally thousands of parents in our church who have put into practice what the Bible teaches about the family, and they and their families have been greatly blessed for it.

As society continues its mad quest to eliminate the family, and as our whole culture therefore unravels more and more, it becomes more important than ever for Christians to understand what the Bible teaches about the family, and to put it into practice in our homes. It may well be that the example we set before the world through strong homes and healthy families will in the long run be one of the most powerful, attractive, and living proofs that when the Bible speaks, it speaks with the authority of the God who created us—and whose design for the family is perfect.

[1] . Amy Benfer, "The nuclear family takes a hit" (7 Jun 2001), Salon.com.

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