

Editorial: Marriage and the Family

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Cultural opposition to a biblical view of marriage, family, and the role of women appears to be unending. The rise of the pro-homosexual movement constitutes one example of an anti-family agenda. Some denominations are not merely debating whether homosexuality is morally permissible. They are disputing whether or not homosexuals should be ordained as ministers of the gospel. Many unbelievers insist that rejecting the moral legitimacy of homosexuality stems from hatred. Unfortunately, some who maintain that they are believers make the same argument. The worldview of secular culture does not only oppose the church; in some instances it has invaded and captured the mind of some who claim the name of Christ. Many ordinary Christians would be shocked to discover what is taught about marriage, family, and the role of women in colleges and universities that claim to be Christian.

As believers, our desire is to submit to the lordship of Christ in every arena of life. There is no realm over which Jesus Christ should not reign as our sovereign. Hence, we submit to scriptural authority in formulating our view of marriage, the family, and the role of women. We do not trumpet our own ideas about marriage, nor do we appeal to “our experience” or “what God told me” when facing controversial questions like divorce and remarriage or the role of women. We turn to the scriptures to study and seek what God has to say about topics that provoke debate even among Christians. We acknowledge that the Bible has the final and authoritative word on how to conduct ourselves as

husbands and wives, parents and children, and men and women.

If our desire is to pattern our lives by the scriptures, we must study and understand them. Before we proclaim the truth, we must ensure that we know the truth, and such knowledge can only be derived from study. The scriptures are clear, for example, that divorce is never a good thing. It is never ideal for marriages to break apart, for the covenant bond between a husband and wife to be severed. Recent sociological study confirms that children suffer significantly as a result of divorce. The claim that divorce is “better for the children” is in most instances a myth. Preserving marriage, working at a marriage is one of the pathways for our sanctification and holiness as Leigh Conner demonstrates in this issue. When we marry, we enter the school of holiness, as we submit to what God desires to teach us.

The covenantal union between men and women, more particularly the joys of the physical consummation of that union is portrayed in the Song of Solomon. Danny Akin’s sermon from Song of Solomon addresses the responsibilities of husbands and wives. Dr. Akin reminds us that Christ is Lord over every realm of our lives, including how we behave sexually.

Is divorce ever justified? I have already noted that divorce is never ideal, but is it in some cases permissible? The church of Jesus Christ has debated this question throughout history. We have two very fine articles on this question in the current issue. Gordon Wenham, a well-known OT scholar from England, argues that divorce

is permissible in some instances but never remarriage. William Heth takes the other position. He maintains that both divorce and remarriage are justified in some cases. Those who have followed the exegetical debate on divorce and remarriage may be surprised to see Wenham and Heth writing on *opposing* sides relative to divorce and remarriage. In 1984 they published a book together defending the view that remarriage is never right, and an updated edition holding the same position appeared in 1997. Wenham continues to hold the view propounded in both the 1984 and 1997 editions. Heth, on the other hand, has slowly changed his mind, and readers are introduced to his new position here. Our hope is that readers will come to an informed understanding on divorce and remarriage through the help of these two articles.

We are all aware of the intense debate on the role of women in the church. Books propounding the egalitarian view continue to pour forth from publishers. A new book on women, slaves, and homosexuals by William Webb has provoked some discussion. Some have wondered if his hermeneutical approach represents a new breakthrough. In an extended review article I argue that Webb's thesis is not compelling. At the end of the day his conclusions do not differ significantly from the typical egalitarian reading of the text. The old egalitarian reading of the text is simply dressed up here in new hermeneutical clothes.

The relationship between parents and children is fundamental to human society. If families prosper society prospers. If families are dysfunctional, society becomes dysfunctional. Rigorous study of biblical texts on the relationship between parents and children is lacking. We are delighted

to include an essay on this subject by a Hungarian NT scholar, Peter Balla. Dr. Balla's essay is part of a larger forthcoming monograph in which he investigates the biblical teaching on parents and children.