

The Theology of the Christian Home

Perhaps one of the most significant issues we can address today is that of the home and the family. I don't need to shock you with startling statistics about the failure of so many families in our world today. Many of the indicators of family failure are rising; many of the indicators of family health are declining. Many influential voices in our culture are promoting things that endanger the traditional family. Leaders in business, government, athletics, media, entertainment, and education all promote ideas that weaken the family. If we listen to these voices and fall under their influence, our families will be in big trouble.

So what we need to do is review and make sure we are following biblical principles that guide family life. This summer, that's what we'll be doing—taking another look at the biblical principles that we must apply to our families. The entire biblical pattern for family life is under attack these days, and we need to reaffirm our commitment to operating our families according to biblical principles.

What I want to do, in part, is to display a biblical picture of the Christian family. Christians need to understand the biblical picture of the family so we can more accurately conform our families to the biblical expectation. We should all aspire to follow the biblical pattern and to reject a worldly pattern of the family. Young people especially need to make a commitment to following the biblical picture before they get married and start a family, even before they start dating or looking for a mate.

Today I want to consider the theology of the Christian family. That is, I want to look at the broad principles from the Bible that should guide our understanding of the home and family. We need to set a good foundation before building on top of it, and the foundation for the family is the biblical teaching—the theology—of the family. If we fail to understand and apply these foundational issues, nothing else we believe about the family will matter.

And the foundation is always the Bible and what it teaches. The Bible is the ultimate authority. God has spoken on this topic, and we are obligated to understand and apply God's wisdom to our families. The world hates what God has said about the family; the world rejects God's ways; it hates what God loves. But as Christians, we must seek to guide our families by biblical principles, not by worldly error.

The first and most obvious teaching of the Bible that pertains to the family is...

I. God set apart humanity from the rest of creation.

This is a foundational issue that helps us understand God's purposes for the family. If our understanding of *humanity* is flawed, then our understanding of the family will be in error.

Genesis 1:27–28 *God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* ²⁸ *Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

- A. We can go way back to the very beginning and affirm that there is a God, and we are not him. God is the Creator, and we are part of the creation. That immediately puts us in a submissive role. We didn't make ourselves; God made us. He put us here for a purpose. Our goal ought to be to please our Creator, to fulfill his purpose for us. And that would include his purposes for the family.
- B. When God made everything, he set man apart from all the rest of creation by creating him in the image and likeness of God. Nothing else in all creation reflects the image of God like humanity does.
- C. This fact shows us that we are not just a pack of animals. God's purpose and intent for mankind is different from his intent for all other parts of creation. We have a certain dignity and value because we reflect the image and likeness of God.
- D. That's an important distinction for us to recognize today. If we all evolved from the primordial soup 2 billion years ago, then there are no absolute values by which to order our lives. Everything is in the process of evolution, including the family. So why not remake the family into whatever anyone wants it to be? Why not radically change the nature of the family? Some people want to eradicate the traditional family altogether—why not? Without God, there is no authority over human relationships. In that case, family can be anything.

- E. Today people are advocating all kinds of relationships and calling it family.
1. They tell us you don't need to get married at all. You can probably have more fun and excitement if you avoid the commitment of marriage.
 2. They tell us that it's fine to have children without being married.
 3. Of course, we now have homosexual so-called "marriages," and the culture is telling us that this is perfectly normal and natural.
 4. Some people today want to be "polyamorous," i.e., they want to have multiple romantic relationships at the same time.
 5. Some tell us today that people within the same family can marry one another. Maybe a father can marry his own daughter. People are promoting that idea now.
 6. I recently heard about platonic marriage—people get married just for the practical benefits of marriage. Romance and love are not part of the relationship. People enter into open relationships where they are married but free to explore intimate relationships with other people.
 7. They tell us that if you do get married and things don't work out, you can easily be divorced and move on to another relationship.
 8. All these kinds of relationships are acceptable in our culture today, and there's no reason to object to any of them if we are all just a bunch of animals doing what our instincts tell us to do. If there is no God, then we can format and remake family relationships any way we want. It doesn't really matter; do what is right in your own eyes.
- F. But if we are the special creation of God, and if God has spoken to us regarding family life, then we have a set of absolute standards to guide family function. We know what is proper and improper for families. We know what is healthy and unhealthy. We know what makes for success and what makes for failure of the family. God has given us an absolute standard to live by.

G. Genesis shows us that God created two different kinds of humans—male and female. There is a clear distinction in the sexes. Men and women are not interchangeable. There can be no transitioning from one to the other. Both male and female are necessary for a family to function properly. All of this is obvious from the first few pages of the Bible. Families are in the terrible condition that they are in because they reject or ignore the plain teaching of the Bible on these matters.

Quote: The creation story in Genesis shows ... that both [Adam and Eve] together [were] created in God’s image (Gen. 1:27). Not merely one of them, but both, and not the one separate from the other, but man and woman together, in mutual relation, each created in his or her own manner and each in a special dimension created in God’s image and together displaying God’s likeness.¹

Trans: So it’s a matter of foundational, basic theology that men and women both bear the image of God and that men and women are distinct and different, yet necessary to each other. If we fail to understand that, our families will be a mess.

II. God has purposes for marriage.

Humanity was the pinnacle of creation. But Adam was alone, and this was not good. So God created a companion suitable for Adam. Adam and Eve formed the first family.

Somebody said that “The history of the human race begins with a wedding.”²

God intended for one man and one woman to enter into an exclusive marriage covenant, and the result of that union would be children. That’s God’s original pattern for the family.

God’s purposes for marriage include

A. Commitment—Gen 2:24 *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*

¹ Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, ed. Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian’s Library Press, 2012), 3.

² Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, ed. Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian’s Library Press, 2012), 1.

Marriage begins a new family. The spouses leave and cleave—they leave their former families and join together to make a new one. The two individuals make a binding oath to one another; it's a covenant to unite in marriage. Usually, some kind of public commitment ceremony marks the union of a couple. Oaths and vows are taken to show that this relationship is unique and permanent.

A new family should not begin without this initial commitment of the two partners to become spouses. In our world, a vast number of people live together without the benefit of marriage. But there is no oath or vow; there is no genuine commitment in the relationship. Either partner could walk away at any time.

That situation is disordered and sinful. If two people want to live together, they should get married; they should “cleave” to one another—be joined in marriage and seal their commitment with oaths and vows. If they are unwilling to make that kind of commitment, then they should not live together.

Covenant commitment is what keeps marriages together. Romantic feelings of love and attraction are good and wonderful, but emotion won't keep a marriage together. What keeps a marriage together is commitment from both spouses. You make vows before God and others to remain within the marriage “till death do us part.” It's that binding covenant that establishes the marriage and keeps it together.

Illus.: A popular song when I was growing up was “Love Will Keep Us Together.” Guess what happened to the composers of that song? They divorced. I guess they fell out of love. Love didn't keep them together.

Illus.: Bill and Melinda Gates are getting divorced after 27 years of marriage. They both have hired 3 lawyers to work through the divorce process. I don't know why they are getting a divorce, but clearly, they no longer have a commitment to one another. I imagine that their feelings toward one another have changed over the years. They no longer feel like they want to be married. And they are no longer committed to the marriage or to one another. So they are getting divorced.

We don't order ourselves by our feeling/emotions; we govern ourselves by truth—God's truth and our commitment to it. Marriage is a commitment; it's a lifetime commitment based on a solemn oath. If you are not ready to make that commitment, you are not ready to get married. Marriage is a commitment.

- B. Companionship—it was not good for the man to be alone (Gen 2:8). Everything in creation was very good except this one thing—the man lacked a suitable partner.

We find in the Genesis account that spouses are to be “meet” or “suitable” or “corresponding to” one another. The woman provides a missing part; the man is incomplete without a wife. Man needs the woman, and the woman needs the man.

Illus.: A famous feminist slogan asserts, “A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.” That's kind of funny, but it is a lie. A man needs a woman, and a woman needs a man. The two complete one another.

Quote: Immediately at creation God implanted within the man's soul the yearning for loving someone who would be like him. That yearning was not satisfied by the animals... The woman is ... the gift God so richly and lovingly bestowed upon him.³

Companionship is a major reason for marriage; it's not good to be alone. If you are a single person of marriageable age and status, it is good for you to find a companion. Companionship is a major blessing of marriage.

[commitment, companionship]

- C. Children—God's design is for a husband and wife to produce offspring. God designed humans to procreate. God commanded the first couple to “be fruitful and multiply,” and most married couples produce children.

³ Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, ed. Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, 2012), 2–3.

Sometimes it doesn't work out for couples to have children, and that's within the providence of God. Where children are present, God wants them to be brought up in a loving, nurturing, godly environment. Normally, that takes two parents. In some cases, one parent has the responsibility to raise the children. But that should be the exception, not the rule. The biblical pattern requires the partnership of a mother and father to raise the children.

And as we consider procreation, we should be very clear that physical intimacy is appropriate only within the bonds of marriage. God designed marriage to protect and restrict physical intimacy. Outside of marriage, intimate contact is sinful—fornication or adultery.

Heb 13:4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

If you are burning with passion for someone (1 Cor 7:9), get married. Marriage is the proper context for passion. Physical passion is restricted to marriage.

We shouldn't need to say it, but we must reaffirm the fact that true marriage requires a man and a woman. There is no such thing as same-sex marriage. Whatever relationship two people of the same sex can have, it's not marriage, no matter what the Supreme Court says. Humans do not have the right to redefine marriage. It's sinful to redefine marriage. It's a great shame that our country as a whole has rejected the biblical definition of marriage and extended that privilege to those who cannot be married.

I will never refer to two people of the same sex as married. Two people of the same sex cannot be married. Same sex marriage is fiction; it does not exist. That relationship is not marriage.

God's pattern for marriage is heterosexual, monogamous, and permanent. That's God's original intent, that's the pattern he established, and it has not changed. When we violate that pattern, we should expect family failure.

Trans: God designed marriage with various purposes in mind—commitment, companionship, and children.

III. Sin is a curse on the family

- A. Before the advent of sin, Adam and Eve were living in the garden in perfect harmony and unity. They were at peace with their Creator and at peace with one another. There were no arguments, no name-calling, no dish-throwing, and no threats of divorce. They were unashamed (Gen 1:25) because they had committed no sin. All was at peace.
- B. But when our first parents fell into sin, it created all manner of havoc. Sin brought down a curse on mankind and on all creation. Sin created brokenness, disintegration, disharmony, and disruption.
 - 1. Sin alienated them from God. They hid from God (Gen 3:8-10). They knew that they had sinned, and they felt guilty and unworthy to be in God's presence. Their sin had created a separation between them and God.
 - 2. Sin alienated them from one another. Adam blamed Eve for the sin—"the woman whom thou gavest to be with me..." The husband would rule over the wife, and she would resist that rule. Strife in marriage began with the first sin. Conflict, for the first time, came into their relationship.
 - 3. Sin alienated them from creation. The woman would experience pain in child birth, the man would make his living by the sweat of his brow, and creation would resist efforts to cultivate it. Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden.
- C. Not long after this, we find the record of the first murder. Cain killed his brother Abel because of envy (Gen 4:8f).
- D. Before long, we find men taking multiple wives (Lamech—Gen 4:19) and killing others out of revenge (Gen 4:23).
- E. After that we have the records of all kinds of family problems—the Bible reveals that the families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all had significant problems. All of that is in the very first book of the Bible.

John MacArthur notes: The Book of Genesis catalogs fratricide (4:8), polygamy (4:19, 23), ... adultery (16:1–4), homosexuality (19:4–11), fornication and rape (34:1–2), incest (38:13–18), prostitution (38:24), and seduction (39:7–12)—each of which directly attacks the sanctity and harmony of marriage and the family.⁴

⁴ John MacArthur, *Different by Design*, MacArthur Study Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 24.

App: Sin is a curse on the family. Every family is negatively affected by sin. We see so many family troubles because families are composed of sinners. That's what makes family life so difficult. A group of sinners all living together in the same house is a disaster waiting to happen. If these sinners all follow their sinful inclinations/passions, we would expect a great deal of family dysfunction.

And what is really tragic is that the children often suffer because of the sinful choices of the parents. Children raised in a disordered environment often follow the same pattern; they duplicate in their families the dysfunction they experienced themselves.

Unfortunately, family dysfunction and failure are very common, even for church-going, Christian families.

As we read through the Bible, we find all kinds of dysfunctional families, even among those who follow God. In fact, most of the family life we find portrayed in the Bible is dysfunctional in some ways. We don't find too many solid, orderly, godly families portrayed in the Bible. That's largely because people did not follow God's original pattern for the family. They violated biblical principles; they sinned against God's good design.

Quote: An entire army of evils besieges the life of the family: the infidelity of the husband, the stubbornness of the wife, the disobedience of the child; ... the denigration of the woman, tyranny as well as slavery, the seduction and the hatred of men, both idolizing and killing children; sexual immorality, human trafficking, concubinage, bigamy, polygamy, polyandry, adultery, divorce, incest; unnatural sins whereby men commit scandalous acts with men, women with women; ... the stimulation of lust by impure thoughts, words, images, plays, literature, art, and clothing [or lack of it]; ...—all of these and similar sins threaten the existence and undermine the well-being of the home.⁵

Trans: The sinful threats against the home are huge. If sin is the main problem, what is the solution?

⁵ Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, ed. Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, 2012), 22.

IV. Salvation is (part of) the solution for the family.

- A. The ultimate solution for sin is salvation. When members of the family put their faith in Christ and start following his commands, the family has the potential to be what God intended for it to be. When sinners come into a right relationship with their Creator, and when they begin to follow his guidance, families can be successful.

Illus.: Someone conducted a study of the families of Jonathan Edwards, a famous preacher, and Max Jukes, a notorious atheist.

Max Jukes, an atheist, lived a godless life. He married an ungodly girl, and from the union there were 310 who died [in poverty], 150 were criminals, 7 were murderers, 100 were drunkards, and more than half of the women were prostitutes. His 540 descendants cost the State one and a quarter million dollars.

Jonathan Edwards lived at the same time as Max Jukes, but he married a godly girl. Of 1,394 known descendants of Jonathan Edwards, 13 became college presidents, 65 college professors, 3 United States senators, 30 judges, 100 lawyers, 60 physicians, 75 army and navy officers, 100 preachers and missionaries, 60 authors of prominence, one a vice-president of the United States, 80 became public officials in other capacities, 295 college graduates, among whom were governors of states and ministers to foreign countries. His descendants did not cost the state a single penny.

The Christian influence of the parents makes a lot of difference for the succeeding generations.

- B. Christian parents should make every effort to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They should follow the commands from Deut 6 to speak of the things of the Lord around the house. They can make sure that their children know the Holy Scriptures from a young age. They can establish an environment where their children will hear the Gospel and be saved. Salvation can make all the difference.

- V. Obedience to Christian values is (part of) the solution for the family.
- A. In the series of messages that I'll be doing on the family, we'll examine the Christian principles for family living. If the members of the family are committed followers of Jesus, and if they are all committed to following Christian principles for family living, then the outcome will be a successful Christian home.
 - B. That doesn't mean it will be a perfect home. Even redeemed sinners are still sinners. We'll never reach perfection on this side of heaven. Some members of the family may reject the biblical pattern and go the way of the world (e.g., story of the Prodigal Son). But if we order ourselves and our homes rightly, according to biblical principles, it's much more likely that our homes can be a small taste of heaven on earth.
 - C. Christian values should control/influence every aspect of family life. The more closely we follow these principles, the better the family functions and the more enjoyable family life becomes.
 - D. We know that there is no guaranteed way of insuring that our children turn out right. Even those raised in a Christian home may, at some point, turn away like the Prodigal Son. We hope and pray that such Prodigals will eventually come to their senses and repent.
 - E. No matter what the outcome, Christian families must be committed to following biblical principles. We must know them and apply them consistently to our individual situations. This has to be the underlying foundation for everything—we are going to order and operate our family according to the Word of God. The Bible must be our instruction manual for operating the family.

Josh 24:15 ... *as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

We need to recognize that almost every institution of culture now stands directly against what God says about the family. The great majority of our culture, and even some professing Christians, reject biblical teaching about the roles of men and women, morality, child discipline, and family relationships. We must not allow the world to influence our thinking on these matters.

Christians must be committed to the original pattern and purpose for the family. We have to keep that biblical picture in mind and strive to reproduce it in our own lives. We know what the Christian family looks like, and we should strive to conform our families to that pattern. Young people, long before they form their own families, must commit themselves to following the biblical pattern for the family.

This is the foundation for understanding the Christian family. God created us and he created the family. Our Creator has certain expectations for the family, and it's in our best interests to fulfill those expectations. Because each family is composed of sinners, family problems are common. But we can overcome family problems when we are committed to following Christ and to following the biblical guidelines for family living.