

The Reformed Family

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Western culture more and more shows itself to be an enemy of marriage and the family. Astronomical divorce rates, remarriage after divorce, homosexual unions and now marriages, and the increasing disregard for the ordinance of marriage by couples who live together and raise children together outside of marriage all contribute to Western culture's attack on marriage. Mothers who leave their children with grandma or at day-care to pursue a career outside of the home, parents limiting the number of children they have so that there is as little interference as possible with the parents' interests and activities, and a refusal to discipline children all contribute to Western culture's attack on the family. Rather than sound the alarm, much of the church world today approves of Western culture's attack on marriage and the family, even lending its theological arsenal to the culture to defend and advance the attack. In light of these trends, which are not new, the true Church of Jesus Christ has the calling to preach the truth about marriage and the family, to catechize her children and young people in the honorable state of marriage and the blessedness of the man and woman who are given children, and to admonish and discipline those members who live in sin with regard to marriage and the family.

Examples of Western culture's attack on marriage abound. The most recent attack concerns homosexual marriage. On May 17, 2004, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts legalized homosexual marriage for citizens of the state. As far as Massachusetts is concerned, men may now marry men, and even women may now marry women. What has begun in Massachusetts will soon follow in other states as well; for courts in other states have already been doing everything they can to sanction this abomination.

Western culture is not only busy attacking marriage by sanctioning homosexual unions. Western culture has been busy for years overthrowing the institution of marriage by its promotion of divorce and remarriage. Divorce is allowed for every conceivable reason. And although the process of a divorce still costs a significant amount of money and consumes much time, the divorce rate continues to be high. Some estimates put the divorce rate in the country as high as 50%. Because of the high divorce rate and the significant financial and emotional cost of securing a divorce, some young couples decide to forego marriage altogether. They decide to live together and raise children together as if they were married, but they refuse to enter into the bond of marriage in the first place.

Having undermined marriage, Western culture goes to work on the family. The attack on the family focuses on children and the parents' attitude toward their children. Children are not viewed by the society as a blessing, but as a nuisance. That society views children as a nuisance comes out in the actions of the parents toward their children and in the advice that the popular culture gives to parents regarding their relation to their children. Parents are encouraged to limit the size of their family by using contraceptives to prevent the conception of too many children. At all costs, time must be left for the parents to pursue their own pleasure and their own leisure without the interference of a houseful of kids.

Western culture also attacks families by taking the mother out of the home. The parenting magazines are full of articles that promote the absence of mother from the home. At worst, these

magazines and articles encourage mothers to abandon their children in day-care or at grandmother's house so that the mothers are free to pursue their careers outside of the home without the nuisance of raising their own children. At best, these magazines and articles present the mother's abandonment of the home as an acceptable alternative to the mother being a keeper at home.

When Western culture attacks marriage and the family, we are not surprised. The ungodly culture of the world has never been a friend of biblical marriage and the covenant family. Ancient Greece and Rome, with all of their high culture, were full of homosexuality. In some cases, the male children were taken out of the home and away from their parents at an early age for the purpose of training them in the art of war. Scripture tells us of the horrendous destruction of the family by the godless cultures surrounding Israel, which at times was practiced also by Israel. For example, part of the service of the god Molech involved burning one's own children as they made them "pass through the fire" (cf. [II Kings 17:17](#)).

What is more surprising is that the nominal church stands right behind the ungodly culture, encouraging and defending the culture's destruction of marriage and the family. On every issue, from homosexual marriage to the various ways of viewing children as a nuisance, the apostate and apostatizing churches of the day stand ready to defend the culture.

The biblical and Reformed view of marriage and the family is based on the life of God Himself. God is a covenant God in Himself, living in perfect fellowship as the Triune God. God is the original family, the Father eternally generating the Son in love and the Son eternally being generated by the Father in love. The Father, in His love for the Son, breathes after His Son the Holy Spirit, and the Son does the same to the Father. In His love for Himself, God has determined to reveal Himself in Christ as the covenant God to creatures outside of Himself. The church was eternally chosen by God as the bride of His incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the whole Reformed view of marriage and the family is founded upon God as the covenant God. That the Reformed view of marriage and the family flows out of the truth of God's own covenant life in Himself is not strange. The structure of the Belgic Confession indicates that all Reformed doctrine is founded upon the knowledge of God. After a few introductory articles on Scripture, the Belgic Confession begins its treatment of the doctrines of Scripture with the doctrine of the Trinity. So important is the knowledge of God for all of doctrine, that even before its introductory articles on the Word of God, the Belgic Confession begins in Article One with a confession that "there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God." The knowledge of God is foundational to the knowledge of all the other doctrines of Scripture.

As far as marriage is concerned, marriage is one of the outstanding covenant symbols that points to the relationship between Christ and His church. That marriage is an outstanding covenant symbol of Christ's marriage to His church is taught by the apostle Paul in [Ephesians 5](#). After explaining how a man and a woman ought to live together as husband and wife, the apostle concludes, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" ([Ephesians 5:32](#)). Therefore, when a Christian man and a Christian woman enter into marriage, they are not primarily entering into an arrangement that suits themselves and their own happiness. Rather, they are entering into a bond that reflects the love and union of Christ and His church.

The rest of the rules regarding marriage flow out of this covenantal truth. Marriage may not be broken by man (with one exception) because Christ does not break His marriage with the church. Only those whom God has designated are candidates for marriage, because marriage was God's institution as a symbol of His Son's marriage. Not two men or two women, but one man and one woman are eligible to marry.

With regard to the family and children's place in the family, God declares that children are a blessing to the godly husband and wife. "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" ([Psalm 127:3-5](#)). It is folly for the covenant husband and wife to attempt to limit the number of children they have for their own selfish interests. Also, in His wisdom, God has fitted and equipped the mother for the high calling of nurturing those covenant blessings in the home.

The proper view of marriage and the family is being attacked by modern culture and the modern church. But let the true church of Christ protect the proper view of marriage and the family among her own members. The church must preach the truth of marriage in connection with the great symbolism of marriage as the marriage of Christ and the church. The church must catechize her children and young people in how to marry and how to raise a family. The church must also admonish and discipline those members who walk in sin with regard to marriage and the family. By these means, God preserves His covenant people not only in the proper view of marriage and the family, but in a proper walk in marriage and in the family.

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